

CASTE QUESTION AND MARXISM

Three important articles selected from a book published by Arvind Memorial Trust.

This book was a collection of papers presented during Fourth Arvind Memorial Seminar (12-16 March 2013, Chandigarh)

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THE CASTE QUESTION AND ITS RESOLUTION: A MARXIST PERSPECTIVE

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No revolutionary project of making the Indian society exploitation-free can be made by excluding the caste question. There are enough grounds to reject outrightly the belief that first the caste-system should be eradicated at the socio-political plane through certain conscious attempts and only then the revolutionary mobilisation of various groups of people would be possible. Its opposite viewpoint is equally wrong that the revolutionary mobilisation of various groups and the process of revolution would by itself eliminate the caste-system and therefore this question by itself does not form an important issue. It is our clear conviction that the process of the preparation of the proletarian revolution cannot move forward without clearly targeting the numerous forms of caste-based oppressions and the institutions which play the role of its carrier and agent; without this the revolutionisation and mobilisation of the various classes of the toiling masses suffering from social segregation is simply not possible. At the same time, the vanguard of revolution will have to present a historical, scientific and rational project for the elimination of caste which despite being long-term (which quite obviously it will be) must have some concrete immediate tasks as well. This much is certain, though, that even after the establishment of proletarian state, a perpetual process of revolution would have to be carried out at the ideological and cultural plane along with the socialist transformation of the

Keynote paper presented in the Fourth Arvind Memorial Seminar on the topic 'Caste Question and Marxism' (12-16 March 2013, Chandigarh). Contact: info@arvindtrust.org

production-relations and the prolonged process of the gradual advancement of the socialist social-political-educational-cultural edifice, for the ultimate elimination of the caste-system. In this paper, we will discuss this proposition of ours in detail and we will also refute the prevalent propositions which are wrong, incomplete, vague and confusing in our view.

There are many questions that will confront us if we proceed towards the concrete implementation. Even though there exists a clash in the interests of the capitalists, big and medium traders, kulaks, farmers, people in the upper-middle class strata and other parasite communities—who constitute the ruling class—and its supporting classes, they stand united when it comes to the political policy decisions and actions against the toiling masses. On the other hand, besides other problems, a vital problem in the path of the unity of the proletariat and semi-proletariat of the villages and cities, the lower-middle class and the lower middle peasants—who constitute the main strength of the revolution—is that they are divided along caste-lines and there exists numerous walls of social segregation at multiple layers. The moot question is whether the causes of the caste-based prejudices and the contradictions which are almost all-pervasive in the Indian society in one form or the other are only superstructural (the old values or in the words of some, the influence of the Brahmanic culture) or there are some economic factors as well which tend to give support and strength to the super-structural factors. Quite often it so happens that behind an incident of caste-clash and caste-based oppression, the main reason happens to be the clash of the economic interests of the classes in varying intensity. But the polarisation which takes place in the society in such cases is on the basis of caste only! The bourgeois parliamentary politics of vote-bank in India makes the caste polarisation as one of its tools. But is this the main cause behind the sharp caste-contradictions? If caste happens to be just a burden of the past, feudal remnant or the influence of the ‘Brahminic’ culture, then some radical social movements could overthrow it in due course. But it does not seem to be likely. The caste-system is not that static as it appears to be. It has a particular kind of internal dynamism due to which it has managed to register its effective presence even today after originating in the ancient

India and crossing historical epoch of the medieval and colonial era. It was capable of adapting itself to every socio-economic formation and the ruling classes of the different historical era have managed to adapt it for serving their interests.

The confusion regarding the inter-relationship of the caste and class prevails partly due to bookish scholars' own misgivings; partly it is due to the influence of the accepted leaders of the oppressed castes who were filled with ignorant prejudices against Marxism; some confusion exists due to the American sociological ideas and the bourgeois ideologies of post-modernism like the 'politics of identity'; some of it is due to the theories concocted by the petty bourgeois intellectuals, inspired as they are by their class interests; while other confusions arise out of the mechanical materialist analyses and misdeeds of the dilettante and revisionist Marxists and still others persist because in the past the communist movement, like on the other fundamental questions of Indian revolution, did not present a concrete programme after thorough analysis on the caste question as well. However, there are several concrete objective bases of these confusions. The main objective basis, for instance, is that while the majority of the Dalit castes is proletariat or semi-proletariat (mostly rural but increasingly urban also), the majority of the proletariat and semi-proletariat does not come from the Dalit castes. Most of the *kulaks* in the villages today belong to the middle castes and they are far ahead of the feudal lords and land owners belonging to the upper castes when it comes to oppressing the Dalits, however the majority of these very middle castes is either poor or lower-middle peasant and they have even joined the ranks of the working class. People from all castes are there among the capitalists (Dalits are very rare), but even today the upper castes dominate the bureaucracy and intellectual professions, particularly on the higher positions. Owing to reservation Dalits and some middle castes have also managed to reach in this sphere, but their percentage is very less as compared to their population and this percentage has steadily declined from lower to higher posts. A practical question, thus, arises as to how should a common front against the caste-system be forged? Is it possible without spreading the democratic consciousness among the poor masses of the upper and other castes through revolutionary propaganda and without

mobilising them on the common economic and political issues? And till this process is not moved forward, whether the revolutionary mobilisation and forging a strategic united front would be at all possible? Can the caste-based mobilisation of Dalits only, take them to their real emancipation and elimination of caste?

Yet another point is that the constitutional and legal provisions for some concessions, reliefs and security to the Dalit castes is one thing, but the complete end to the Dalit oppression, their social segregation and their humiliating and inferior social condition and elimination of the caste system is quite another. Does the path of the concessions like reservation ultimately go to the emancipation of Dalits and the elimination of caste? Do we see any such possibility within the purview of the Indian constitution (the experience of 62 years is before us) or within the ambit of the extremely limited, skewed and distorted Indian capitalist democracy which was born from the womb of colonialism and brought up in the era of imperialism? How much the Dalits have benefitted from reservation in the last six decades and with this pace how long will it take for them to overcome their woeful condition? Reservation, when it was given, was quite pertinent as a bourgeois democratic right, but hasn't it now become more of a means to create bourgeois democratic illusion than a bourgeois democratic right? Isn't this also an issue that the Dalit intellectuals who have been uplifted and who have become part of the urban middle class through reservation do not share any interest with the Dalit proletariat of the villages and cities and they are the ones who get the benefits of the concessions provided by the government. That is the reason why despite lashing out at the caste-system, quite often they are not prepared to think on any project of elimination of caste and Dalit-emancipation which goes beyond reservation and the ambit of Indian constitution, they are not prepared to contemplate on the Dalit movements of the past and their theoretical basis and on the role of their theoreticians and even in the present time they give thesis of producing capitalists from within the Dalits, at times they propound the idea of the united front of the "Bahujan Samaj" or increasing the count of Dalit leaders in every party and at other times at the more theoretical level they end up celebrating the caste identities. The result of upsurge of the identities is visible in the

form of increasing discord and segregation within the Dalits who are already divided in different castes and sub-castes. Intense struggles are witnessed among them on the issue of distribution of reservation and reservation within reservation. This is a bitter truth which cannot be overlooked if we are to reach to correct conclusion.

We will have to analyse and sum up the ideology, historical outlook, economic and political thoughts of Dr. Ambedkar with scientific objectivity and by freeing ourselves from all prejudices. Idol worship or making the leaders as incarnation is Brahmanic and capitalist tendency of hero-worship which needs to be shunned. It is also a moot question as to what were the reasons behind the degeneration and disintegration of the politics of the smaller and bigger pioneer parties of the Dalit politics such as Republican Party, Dalit Panthers, BSP, Puthiya Tamizhgam which have been emerging from time to time in the post-Ambedkar era of Dalit politics only to form alliance later with this or that main bourgeois Party (upper caste and middle caste dominated parties from their analytical perspective). Why is it that the motley of the radical Dalit intellectuals did not even make an attempt to build an anti-caste social movement with broad social base? We have to find out what is the project of the Dalit-emancipation and the annihilation of caste-system of the radical Dalit politics and the new and old Dalit theoretical trends and what are their forms of implementation?

Today, most of the revolutionary communists also admit, in a gesture of guilt-consciousness and self-condemnation, that the communist movement completely ignored the caste question in the past and that it adopted a class-reductionist and mechanical economist approach. This is often said in very general terms or instead of concretely analysing the concrete facts of history, only some reference is given eclectically of a few incidents. In what form did this weakness manifest itself in the overall line and practice of the communist movement in the past and whether it was an independent weakness or was it a part of the the general lacuna in developing a strategy and general tactics of revolution after concretely analyzing the socio-economic and political conditions of India? Yet, whether there was any contribution of the communist movement in the movement for the emancipation

of Dalits? Yet another fashionable statement these days is that the communists adopted wrong attitude towards the Dalit leaders and movement. This conclusion calls for a detailed consideration, only then the concrete mistakes and weaknesses could be understood. It needs to be looked as to what were the differences between the standpoints of the communist leadership and the Dalit leadership during the freedom movement on the burning questions of those days and which standpoint was correct. What also needs to be looked at is what was the attitude of the leadership of the Dalit movement towards the communist movement and the communist ideology.

Several trends are in vogue within the communist movement these days. There are some who, while cursing the class-reductionist perspective of the past and the terrible mistake of placing caste into superstructure (nobody knows who did it and when!), go to the extent of claiming that the widely accepted Marxist concept of “Base-Superstructure metaphor” itself is mechanistic, there are those who blame its mechanical understanding; some others term the mode of production itself as the base instead of total sum of all production-relations; some claim that production-relations are derived from the caste-system, while others talk of the reflection of the production-relation into the caste-system; some of them term the caste-system itself as the production-relations in the past whereas others while talking about the phenomenal plane and structural plane give a thesis that in today’s complex capitalist society, the class struggle would take place in the form of social movements (like the movements of caste, gender, environment etc.) only. In other words there is a deep ideological confusion. There is no way out other than clearing the air of confusion. Yet another trend in vogue seeks to harmonise Marxism and Ambedkarism, this trend has multiple forms though. In such a pursuit what is discussed is Ambedkar’s contribution in the interest of Dalits, but no detailed discussion takes place on Ambedkar’s philosophical moorings, his concrete project for the Dalit emancipation, his economic thoughts, his political stand on various issues, his role as the maker of constitution and as Law minister and his thoughts on Marxism. Some quotations are chosen dexterously to prove the possibility

of his proximity with the communist stream. In fact all such varied endeavours are aimed at winning the hearts of the Dalit population, to take them along by implying—look, we have adopted your hero, now will you please come along with us! No part of the population would come with them in the the struggle for the emancipation of masses with such emotional tactical manoeuvres. They would come along only when one could convince them in theory and in practice that the correct and rational path of their emancipation lies with him only. Such a process would admittedly be difficult and a bit lengthy. We do not have any reservation about harmonising with Ambedkarism, nor do we reject his role outrightly. But we will have to see as to what are the elements in Ambedkar's thoughts which can be borrowed by Marxism to overcome its lacuna. Those equipped with scientific vision do not play the politics of emotions, science calls for concrete facts and objectivity. Based on the macro and micro analysis of the total sum of the production-relations, it is our clear belief that India is a backward capitalist country and here the immediate and long-term tasks need to be set while presenting a project for the elimination of the caste-system right from the period of the preparation for the socialist revolution which would end all the remnants of imperialism-feudalism and all pre-capitalist vestiges. Caste is not just a feudal remnant. Capitalism has articulated itself with its structure, it has adopted it in a changed form to further its own interest. This is a capitalist caste-system. It is organically woven with the economic base (total sum of the production-relations) and its effective presence in the ideological-political-social superstructure remains intact.

It is the limitation of this essay that we can present our stand only briefly. Still, it would perhaps be sufficient for starting a prolonged and meaningful debate afresh. We will mainly present our stand positively in this essay. Owing to the lack of space its nature would not be polemical, yet at relevant places, criticism of wrong stands and commonly perceived notions would be presented. Our aim behind this is to start a healthy debate. This debate might be prolonged, but ultimately we must reach at some definite conclusions.

A Historical Materialist Perspective on the Origin and Evolution of Caste

It is not our objective here to present the entire history of the caste-system. The history will be discussed briefly in order to understand the relation of caste with the production-relations, the relation between the caste and the class and how and where does the caste-system fit in the Marxist metaphor of base and superstructure.

Firstly, nothing can be said with certainty about the concrete reasons as to why the caste-system originated and evolved in its specific form in India only because the researches as of now do not provide any clear indication. The social division of labour of the initial or primitive type got fossilised in the form of the caste-system in India through the social customs based on religious rituals which emerged from the same objective social bases. Similarly, in Egypt also a system based on endogamy and dynastic occupation resembling the caste system got ossified in the form of guild-system, but since the the codified foundation of social ethics based on religion behind it was not that systematic and since it did not have the flexibility of adapting itself as per the changes occurring in the socio-economic structure, it could not last very long. In our pursuit to find out the reason as to why the caste system originated and evolved in India only, we could ponder over the factors such as weather, climate, relatively more conducive environment for life and agricultural productivity, the slow motion of history and the labour process originating from it, relatively more dexterous division of labour between mental labour and manual labour within the ambit of division of labour right from the beginning (and further sub-divisions within the confines of manual labour) and dexterity and foresightedness in building up a social code of conduct by the parasitic intellectuals (Brahmin priests) who had excessive free time. But this would be the sphere of guess and speculation and not of history. What can be surely discussed based on the historical researches is as to how the caste-system was originated and how and why it remained intact by adapting itself to the changing epochs of history. And we will do this in brief because at least this much is necessary for a debate on the current situation and on any project of the elimination of caste.

Secondly, often this charge is levelled on the Marxists in a very casual manner that they mechanically apply the stages of the historical social development as identified by Marx-Engels (Slavery-Feudalism-Capitalism) and their 'Asiatic Mode of Production' and 'motionlessness of self-reliant village communities'. This is sheer ignorance. The notion of Asiatic mode of production and the existence of slavery in India as in Greece and Rome was refuted more than half a century ago (first by Kosambi) and now if we leave aside the differences in the details, almost all the Marxist historians have a consensus on this issue. More or less the same is the case with the notion of stagnation of the village communities. However, it is an established fact even today that in the beginning of the thirteenth century some changes took place in the structure of the already existing Indian feudalism which resembles with 'oriental despotism' of Marx. It is also noteworthy that some significant changes took place in the thinking of Marx himself in the decade of 1870s about the homogeneity and stagnation of village community vis-a-vis his thinking in the decade of 1850s. On this topic, the essays of many scholars including **Irfan Habib** and **Suniti Kumar Ghosh** have been published way back in the decade of 1980 itself. There is yet another relevant point which needs to be discussed here. Often it is said that since the study model of Marxism was Europe, it proved to be incapable in studying the Indian society and its specificities like the caste system. This is a superficial viewpoint. Marxism was born mainly out of studying the dynamics of the European society (which happened to be the classical model of the capitalist development) and its main source consisted of the German philosophy, British political economy and French socialism. But the vision of Marx-Engels encompassed the general orientation of the development of the entire world. Dialectical and Historical Materialism which was derived from the generalisation of the historical development is a worldview and a methodology which shows the way to study life and nature and to actively intervene in them. It is because of this reason that it has been used to study the varied aspects of the socio-economic structure and developing the strategies of class struggle in many countries including of Asia, Africa, Latin America apart from Russia and China. India is no exception to it. In this context, it

is noteworthy that Marx and Engels made six or seven comments and gave some explanations on the caste-system from the German Ideology (1845–46) to *Capital* Vol-I which provide important insight in understanding the caste-system (for the comments and explanations, **Conception of Caste in Marx**, a research paper by B.R. Bapuji and Rangnaykamma's article **Marx on Caste** can be referred).

Based on the evidence available so far, a more acceptable proposition is that the urban civilisation of Indus/Saraswat was not destroyed by the Aryan invasion, but there were some other reasons for it (which could be anything ranging from changing the course of rivers, internal stagnation or internal class- struggle). The process of the entry of nomadic pastoral Aryan tribes from the north-west into India began some centuries after the fall of the Harappan civilisation. For the nomadic tribes, purity of blood bore no meaning and the Aryans did not form a race based on heredity, though they were definitely aware about their separate identity on ethnic basis. Even though the urban civilisation of the the Indus valley got disintegrated by the time Aryans arrived in the subcontinent, but its pre-Aryan population was probably scattered in the forests and small settlements along with the priests and ordinary population. There are ample evidences of their struggle with the Aryans and their defeat and their conversion into slaves (dasas) within the Rigveda itself. Not only this, the mythological and linguistic evidences also indicate towards the clash of Aryans with other progressing non-Aryan tribes and towards latter's defeat and their amalgamation in the Aryan social system. The excavation of the Mohanjo-daro and Harappa and the export of slaves from Meluha (Indus valley) to Mesopotamia during 2300-2000 BC have proved that a class society existed in the cities of Indus valley in which the institution of slavery did exist. The slaves were controlled through coercion and religion based social customs, hence the priests of the scattered population of this civilisation were more advanced than the tribal priests of the nomadic pastoral Aryans insofar as the totems and taboos and the religious rites are concerned. Consequently, the process of intermingling of the pre-Aryan and other non-Aryan priests with the priestly class of the Aryan tribe which was set to make a transition from animal

husbandry to agriculture and towards forming settlements seems to be an undisputable fact and the origin of the Brahmin varna can be seen in this process. Further, historical evidences are available to establish that many foreign and particularly Sythian priestly classes also got amalgamated at later point of time into the Brahmin varna (*Kadhda* and *Mag* Brahmins). By the time we reach the eastern Uttar Pradesh, which also happens to be the centre of the discourse of *Upnishads*, we get the evidence of thoroughly intermingled population of the Brahmins in *Vrihadaranyak Upnishad* and through Patanjali.

The earliest Vedic evidences mention two varnas viz. *Arya* and *Daas* or *Dasyu*. They did not conduct marriages among each other. *Daasas* were the common people of the pre-Aryan and non-Aryan society whose condition was not like that of chattel slavery of Rome in which the slaves were the personal property of the owners, rather it was Helot like servitude because the wealth of Aryans used to be the collective property of the tribe and the phenomenon of the private property was yet to surface. Even the land which they had begun to till and sow was still a common property of the tribe. With the transition from animal husbandry to agriculture, gradual development of the production of surplus and the proto-type of the division of labour took place and the process of socio-economic differentiation and formation of classes ensued and moved forward. In *Daan-stutis* we get the evidence of giving away of slaves as a gift to some special groups of the tribal chiefs. With the servile labour and enriched techniques of food production, the Aryan tribes moved ahead in the Doab area in the east and began establishing new permanent settlements. During this period the production-relations within the tribal organisation were in the form of four varnas—*Brahmin* (priestly class), *Rajanya* or *Kshatriya* (warriors and rulers), *Vish* (common people, mainly peasants) and *Shudra* (Helot type servants of non-Aryan origin). The earliest mention of the *chaturvanya* (4 varnas) system is found in the *Purusasukta* of *Rigveda*, although it appears to be a later addition. In all probability, the *chaturvarna* system emerged in the later vedic period—in the period of *Yajurveda*, *Atharvaveda* and the early Brahmanic texts. One of the material bases of the division between *Brahmins* and *Kshatriya* existed since the period of animal

husbandry itself. Normally two elite classes have been seen to be emerging in the pastoral tribes – the first which used to shoulder the responsibility of raiding the cattle and protecting ones' own cattle and the other which used to be experts in the rituals like animal sacrifice and gifting precious articles of the society for divine blessing for the prosperity of the animal wealth. Even in the stage of agriculture, religious rituals played a significant role, the number of deities had increased and rituals and rites of worship had got complicated. At the same time, the importance of religious code of conduct for coordinating the social system was enhanced. Apart from priestly work and being the custodians of *varna* system, the importance of calendar for regulating the agricultural activities and the monopoly of Brahmins over this skill also contributed in strengthening the position of Brahmins.

It is to be noted that the process of intermingling in the four *varna* system was not confined to the level of Brahmins only. Even *Rajanyas* or *Kshatriyas* were as much influenced by this because due to invasions and revolts it was difficult to maintain the dynastic monopoly over the armed force. Many a times even the chiefs of the vanquished tribes were included in the *Rajanya varna*. Later on many *Shudra* kings who established their rule on a new territory (or through revolt) were deemed to be *Kshatriyas*. Evidences are also found of the acceptance of the foreign rulers as *Kshatriyas* in due course. We also find the instances of the *Shudras* getting free and becoming independent peasant by paying some definite gift. Now we will talk about *Shudras* and *Vaishyas*. The people belonging to the *Vaishya varna* were earlier performing agricultural activities and the *Shudras* used to work in the farms as Helot type servants. With the expansion of agricultural land and the progress of the production, process the division of labour became more complex and the importance of exchange got enhanced. A section of *Vaishyas* moved to trading. This process kept on unfolding. The second urban revolution which took place on the eve of the emergence of Buddhism absorbed the major part of the *Vaishyas* owing to the expansion of trade and diversification of the trade sector and several new trading castes got included into it. The agricultural work now mostly became the task of the *Shudra varna* and gradually their condition improved slightly.

Now let's see the process of the origin of the *Antyaj* castes which were outside the four *varna* system and were at the bottom of the hierarchy and who, after getting settled in the society, got the status of untouchables doing manual works and who were involved in other 'lower' level work. Many food-gatherers who got defeated by Aryans got transformed into the lowest castes. Their position was so low that they were outside the four *varna* system. In *Manusmriti* several such castes have been kept in the category of *Sankar* (hybrid) such as the *Saindhra* who trap the animals, *Kaivarts* the boatmen, *Nishads* who catch fish, *Meds*, *Andhras*, *Chunchus* and *Madgus* who hunt the games, *Kshatris*, *Pukkakas* and *Ugras* who hunt the animals living in holes, *Pandus* and *Sopaks* who make sticks and *Karavars* and *Ghigvans* who do leather work. Manu has termed them the fifteen inferior *varnas* outside the four *varna* system. Buddhist texts describe *Chandaals* and *Nisaads* as hunters. These were mainly untouchable castes which were the victim of apartheid right from the beginning. Even in *Jatak Kathas* we find mention of separate villages for craftsmen (metal and wood workers) and wood workers, chariot makers and *vaidyas* (doctors) too are kept in the *Sankar* castes in the *Manusmriti*. It is very much possible that during the second urban revolution, under the pressure of division of labour, a section of the tribes which was being absorbed into the wider society got separated and formed separate castes of the craftsmen and they were kept in the category of *Antyaj* or *Sankar*.

From the available evidences it appears that in the beginning the rules of endogamy did not prevail within the four *varnas* in general and within the top three *varnas* in particular. It was only later that they were consolidated into the rules of endogamy. It is very much possible that when the tribes were getting absorbed in the wider society they brought the traditions related to endogamy along with them. The emergence of castes as separate sub-groups within the *varnas* was the outcome of various historical processes. The main material basis for this was the division of labour gradually getting more complex along with the productive forces whose systematisation required certain social code of conduct in the guise of religion, hierarchy and class-divisions apart from the political system. The co-option of other tribal communities within the

varna-system was possible only on the condition that the boundaries of those communities are delimited by preserving their value system. *Manusmriti* emphasises that *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas* and *Vaishyas* are *dvij* (twice born) and *Shudras* are single born. The fifteen inferior *varnas* are discussed outside this. Thus, a clear dividing line was drawn between the upper three *varnas* and *Shudras* and between *Savarnas* (including *Shudras*) and *Avarnas*. Untouchability was the logical culmination of a social hierarchy which was determined by the Brahmins from the perspective of 'pure' and 'polluted' works. The 'lower' castes were condemned to work the polluted and slave like work on hereditary basis. But most importantly the untouchable castes were available before the farmers or superior land-owners to toil hard on low cost and there was no scope of their getting the right of ownership or the approval of becoming the regular peasants. The principal source of the deep sense of hostility towards such castes in the rest of the society was this clash between the interests and the notions of 'purity' and 'pollution' were merely a means to rationalise this fact.

The number of slaves was very less during the Vedic era. In the initial phase of the agrarian economy most of the slaves were engaged in the domestic works rather than in the productive works. According to the Pali scriptures of the period 400–100 BC and Kautilya's *Arthshastra* the slaves and wage labourers were used on a huge scale in the agricultural works in the north-west India in the post-vedic and Mauryan era. In the Mauryan era, even the farmers used to hire slaves and wage labourers on the *Rashtrabhumi* (farmers' land) and as regards the *Sita* land (state farms), the entire work was done by them.

While it is true that the Brahmins played the most important role in universalising the caste-system and in fossilising the social division of labour by making the caste-system a part of religion and by converting the social behaviour and segregation of the castes into religious rules and laws, the supportive role played by Buddhism and Jainism in this respect cannot be ignored. The theory of the trans-migration of soul was the basic pillar of the Buddhist philosophy. It used to provide indirect justification to the caste-system and used to convince people that their miseries are the outcome of their deeds in the last birth and they can hope to liberate

themselves in the next birth only by doing their *karma*. This theory is an integral part of the ideology of the caste-system in *Manusmriti*. After the establishment of agriculture in place of pastoral life and after the realisation of the harmful effects of large scale animal slaughter by Brahmins, a material ground was paved for the theory of non-violence being propounded by Buddhism and its popularity among the cattle-owning *Vaishyas* was but natural. However, it also provided rationale for pushing the food gathering masses into a condition of servitude and destitution. The Buddhist literature, much like the Brahmin literature, mentions the castes which kill the animals as inferior. Owing to this very principle of non-violence, even the *Vaishyas* who were engaged in agriculture began to be treated as *Shudras*. Much like *Manusmriti* which condemned the animal killing and *Baudhayan* who asked the Vedic readers to keep away from agriculture, Buddha also ordered the monks to stay away from agriculture because it entailed loss of life. Even Jainism preached non-violence and it had the similar impact on the immediate social life. In fact Jainism went further to develop a stringent caste-system akin to Brahmanism. According to *Aadipurān* of Jinsen and *Aadishwarcharit* of Hemchandra, Aadinath Rishabh gave birth to *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Shudras* from his arms, thighs and legs respectively and as per the *Niti-Vachans* of Jainism, his son and successor Bharat created Brahmins to accomplish the religious tasks. Much like Brahmin law makers, Jainism too talks about the hereditary determination of the caste-based professions, shows similar religious prejudices towards *Shudras* and craftsmen and declared *Chandals* as 'polluted'.

The caste system with its several castes and well established rules and regulations had emerged from the *Chaturvanya* (four varnas) system in the pre-feudal society of India itself during the period between the emergence of Buddhism (circa 500 BC) and the age of Gupta empire (4th–5th century AD) owing to the increasingly complex division of labour and a prolonged process of the absorption of the non-aryan tribes into the Aryan society. Some of these castes were falling within the hierarchy of the four varnas, but this was no longer the same four varna system as earlier and some non-varna castes (the discrimination and untouchability prevailed even among them) were kept out of this. A clear dividing

line was drawn between 'pure' and 'polluted'. The rules of intra-caste marriage had become rigid. It needs to be mentioned here that the process which led to the organisation of the caste-system along with the progress of the division of labour also resulted into the subjugation of women in the society and establishment of the intra-caste and intra-gotra system of marriage which played an important role on the economic plane in accumulating the expertise over generations, but on the other hand the possibilities of horizontal movement got hampered as well. Small state and then empires evolved from within the tribal system. While the form of private property was clearer in the cities, an element of private property existed even in the village communities in the form of the division of work, products and facilities based upon caste privileges and professions. Thus the historical process of evolution of endogamy and the families based upon the subservience of women, private property and emergence of state took place here. Considering the three aspects—relatively more stringent division of labour, determination of the forms of ownership and the laws of distribution—the caste system itself constituted a production-relation. There existed a superstructural edifice of religion based political-social institutions and conducts of religious ideologies and institutions which emerged from such production-relations and which influenced it. The classes were composed of the communities of various castes. It was like this: ruling class (mainly *Kshatriyas*), the theoreticians who were the policy makers of the state (*Brahmins*), traders (*Vaishyas*), the peasant castes (*Shudras*) and the slaves (surely not like their Homeric contemporaries) and bonded labourers in form of *Avarnas/ Antyaj*/untouchable castes who constituted the population of subservient workers, who had the right to livelihood only by toiling and did not enjoy any other economic and social rights. Thus caste and class used to overlap each other, the difference was that the castes were such classes which were immobile and rigid due to heredity and endogamy. The machinery of caste-system was such that the maximum surplus could be extracted from the producers by using the minimum force, but peasants and more than them the untouchable labouring castes had to face brutal violence and humiliation in their day-to-day life. The hegemony of religious superstructure was to lessen the

possibility of revolts (yet we do get a few evidences of some revolts).

Caste-system in the Different Phases of Feudalism

Despite the slow growth of the forces of production, a phase did occur when under their pressure, the production-relations of pre-feudal India began cracking and subsequently they started breaking and it resulted into the emergence of feudalism in India. It is not possible here to discuss the differences of opinion that exist among the historians about the process of origin and evolution of feudalism in the early medieval era, nor is it much relevant in our discourse about the caste question. In course of time, it became increasingly difficult for the state of the empires to maintain its hold over the agricultural production in the ever expanding territory and hence there was a push for decentralisation and the temples and Buddhist monasteries were given land grants on large scale. The monasteries and temples used to get their work done from the hired labourers of lower castes, servants and poor peasant castes or they used to give the land to the village community on lease. There was some land under state ownership and collective ownership as well. The emperors and big kings used to collect tax from the rulers under them and these rulers in turn used to rule the village communities falling under their territory. It is very well possible that in due course of time a land owning class would have emerged from within the villages which used to possess armed power and used to act as an intermediary rent-seeker between the state and peasantry. Whatever be the situation, these changes did not have any significant impact on the internal structure of the village community and particularly on the peasant castes and the craftsmen of the 'lowest' category and the untouchable castes.

If we look at the south Indian society (which had come under the influence of Brahmanism as early as Satvahana's era), even there, the peasant population of the village communities was getting suppressed under the backbreaking rent of the powerful feudal lords. They had been deprived of even the rights which they used to enjoy earlier under the village communities and the heads of the communities had slowly acquired the status of the feudal landlord. The caste structure was slightly different here. There was no caste

akin to the Kshatriyas here. The peasant castes (Shudras) existed below the Brahmins and the hellish condition of the lower castes was similar to that in the north. The **feudal lords emerged here from within the peasant castes**. The coastal cities played an important role in the economy of the south. Here the state ownership over land continued to exist under the huge empires of the Pallavas, the Chalukyas and the Cholas and the feudal lords were absentee landlords in most of the cases.

The feudal agrarian relations developed in the eastern India (the region between Bengal and Tripura which had come under the influence of Brahmanism) as well. Here too, the **Kshatriya and Vaishya castes did not exist and the clashes and compromises for power took place between the Brahmins and the Shudras**. Here most of the Shudras were kings and they even made a failed attempt to become Kshatriya. This process of *sanskritisation* led to the improvement in the condition of some castes over the others. Insofar as the “lower” castes are concerned, their condition was no different from that in the rest of India.

After the sixth century AD a process of degeneration of trade and the urban crafts ensued at varying pace in the feudal India and the process of de-urbanisation or ruralisation gained pace due to several reasons which need not be discussed here as it would not be relevant (although the situation was slightly different in the south owing to the continuance of trade from the coastal cities). Many skilled workers returned to the villages in search of livelihood and some got engaged in handicrafts. There was increasing differentiation and sub-differentiation of the castes and this new population found its way in the ‘lower’ Shudras and castes lower than it. In the eleventh century, Al-Baruni described eight castes including weavers and cobblers as part of the socially ostracised ‘antyaj’ castes. The urban guilds of skilled workers faded away. There was no longer a situation like in the past when owing to the hereditary character of the caste-system the forces of production used to get impetus. The **village communities got isolated and became self reliant by this time**. The exchange got confined to the boundaries of villages to a large extent and no longer was there any need for the village communities to give surplus produce in return of their imports. Only few articles like salt and metals had to be

imported from outside. These changes increased the capacity of the village communities to give more surplus to the ruling class. As the caste-system got frozen more and more, its character for the servants of the entire village community—the lower castes—and for the artisans who too belonged to these castes and who used to get compensated for their labour in the form of goods or in the form of land grants, became even more oppressive. Max Weber termed it as the “divine labour”. It was in this period that the customs of *Jajmani* and *Balutdari* also grew which have been described as the principal form of the medieval feudal exploitation in the writings of several writers belonging to the ML stream. There were twelve traditional “Balut” including carpenter, ironsmith, barber, cobbler etc. who used to work for the entire village community and in turn used to get compensated in terms of land grants or part of crops. The process of inclusion of several tribes into the lower ladders of the caste-system in the form of untouchable or ‘ati-shudras’ continued from middle India to Gujarat and Maharashtra. Even the food gathering, animal rearing tribes which remained separate from this system were considered by the Brahmins as inferior and untouchable and they were called as ‘mlechch’. Only a small portion of this population came under the influence of Christianity during the British era. Even today the tribal community’s independent existence remains intact and the Hindutva fascists are putting a lot of effort to Hinduise them and they have even managed to achieve limited success as well. The usage of the term Hindu religion also became prevalent in the medieval era only.

From the beginning of the thirteenth century, some important changes began taking place in the structure of the Indian feudalism. One of the reasons for this was the coming of Islam. But, apart from reshuffling in the status of some castes in the hierarchy of the caste-system and the coming into being of some new castes and sub-castes, it did not bring about any fundamental change. Despite the fact that Islam prohibits polytheism and idol-worship and it disapproves any differences apart from the difference between the free man and slave and between men and women, the caste-system proved to be particularly helpful for the Islamic rulers in revenue collection and in ensuring that the wages as input cost remain low.

Hence, apart from wars and repression of revolts, they did not make any effort towards religious conversion, remained apathetic towards the repression inherent in the caste-system, gave important positions in the administration to the 'upper' caste Hindus and maintained friendly relations with the Hindu kings who accepted their supremacy. Along with the new rulers came the new and widespread technology of handicrafts, the population of the handicraftsmen got expanded to a large extent and the third "urban revolution" of the Indian history began. In the beginning, even the slave trade took place on large scale for the new trades and construction works. In the 13th and 14th centuries, the slave trade was an important component of the urban labour. After the acceptance of Islam, these slaves could be involved in any kind of work after learning a skill. In due course, being free from slavery, these people became urban craftsmen and chiefs of several working community. Even some free people accepted Islam and those 'low' caste Hindus also converted their religion who were fed up with their inferior condition and who wanted to adopt a profession which they could not do earlier. Thus the muslim population increased enormously. However, the converted population brought the influence of the caste-system along with them. The practice of endogamy was prevalent among the weavers, butchers, barbers etc. On the lines of the 'low' Hindu castes, 'kamin' communities developed among the muslims as well. Yet a section of the muslim population remained outside the caste structure and even amongst those who were influenced by it, it was possible to change the profession or violate the law of endogamy. When this population spread to the villages and cities throughout the country in due course, the upper caste Hindu society used to consider the muslim craftsmen and labourers of the 'Kamin' community on the same footing as the untouchables and their economic condition also became similar to the latter. Later, in the British rule the landownership and top posts were confined to the Sheikhs-Saiyyads-pathans. The condition of the larger muslim population deteriorated and the condition of the 'kamin' muslims remains more or less equivalent to the Dalits even today in the independent India as well.

Let us return to the time span which we were discussing earlier.

There was no change in the strength of the Hindu caste-system due to the presence of relatively caste-less muslim population. The only difference was that due to expansion of the trades, some castes got fragmented into new sub-castes and became stable after adopting endogamy. The process of 'sanskritisation' also unfolded owing to the upgradation of some castes. For instance, in the 8th century AD, the Jats were an animal rearing tribe like Chandals, by the 11th century AD, they got upgraded to the position of Shudra and by the turn of 17th century AD, they had become respected peasants of the Vaishya category who used to till their land. After the Jat revolts of the seventeenth century, some Jats started putting efforts for achieving the status of landlords and Kshatriyas. One of the impacts of the people's monotheistic movement (the *Nirgun Bhakti* movement which will be discussed further in the context of the movements of the 'lower' castes) was that some of the castes, when they returned after breaching the boundary of the caste system, they returned as higher caste. All in all, the structure of the caste system remained more or less intact throughout the medieval era despite the existence of some elements of motion and competition. It continued to determine the form of the labour process.

But, at this point we would also like to focus the attention towards some changes occurring in the later medieval era which could open the door for the capitalist development in case the colonisation had not taken place and which could even push the caste-system towards its disintegration. This issue has either been ignored or half-baked and unbalanced explanations have been given. There is a consensus among the leading Marxist historians today on the proposition that despite being relatively isolated units, the class-division and class-gradation in the masses of the Indian villages was much more than what Marx had thought and the internal motion of the clashes born out of class-differentiation did exist. It is true that owing to the amalgamation of the rent and revenue, the state itself was the land-owner. But the surplus production of the villages was not entirely handed over to the state (or its collectors) but there existed a well formed class which used to take its share and which was called as *Zamindar* in the *Mughal* era. Even the elite collectors who used to collect the revenue began cultivating their land on rent

as the owner and *Miraasdars*. The main reason for such individual subordination was the caste-system itself which had organised a huge section of rural labourers. The peasants used to consider the *Zamindar* as the owner of the farm and the latter could even dispossess them of the farms. The elements of the private property did exist clearly in the rights of *Zamindars*, *Mirasdars* and the land owners. This approximately resembled like the feudal land-ownership which had emerged in Europe after the disappearance of the 'Fief' and 'Manor' systems. It was but natural that the Mughal empire fell due to agrarian crisis. Often the *Zamindars* led the peasant revolts against the centralised authoritarian regime of the empire with the help of big farmers and *Mirasdars* of the same caste and after its fall they strengthened and widened their right over the farmers. Even Marx's conception about the Asiatic mode of production and stagnant village community kept on changing. He did admit later that it is hardly possible that the village community existed as a stagnant and motionless system at any point of time. He also mentioned that the transformation of the collective agrarian system into individual agrarian system had gained pace even in the pre-capitalist India.

In the pre-capitalist India, there was adequate development of the rent payment in the monetary form, the saleability of the right of land-lordism and the urban centres involved in commerce, banking, insurance (widespread use of money-laundering, *hundis* and exchange letters) and in the production of consumer goods for the remote markets. Yet there was a hurdle in the path of the capitalist development because it was the surplus production of the village community which was mainly transforming into most of the consumer goods and the continued dependency of the cities and commerce on the mode of exploitation of agriculture by the state. Also, rapid and widespread commercial activities by itself cannot be considered as the capitalist mode of production. The mercantile capital generated in India used to control the artisans through *Dadni* system. That is to say that the traders themselves used to provide the loan and raw material needed for the requisite production to the artisans. Owing to such control and very less wages, the chances of adopting the new technology and tools to extract more work in less time were rare. **Irfan Habib** considers this to be the biggest

stumbling block in the road of capitalist development in the medieval India. But it is surprising that he did not pay attention to the fact that **there did exist a mechanism of production apart from *Dadni* system where there was prevalence of the division of labour (which remains the precondition for the emergence of capitalism) in the workshops of independent master artisans.** From the time of Akbar to the eighteenth century, plenty of evidences of the independent workshops of rich master weavers, printers and carpenters in Bengal, Bihar, Awadh, Surat and Kashmir have been found where hundreds of apprentice and wage labourers used to work. According to **Satish Chandra**, the coastal regions of Gujarat, Choromandal and Malabar had entered into the early phase of capitalist development in the pre-colonial India. After the British control over the coastal regions, these enterprises were destroyed due to rupturing the fabric of the external and internal trade. Historian Pavlov has rightly expressed his surprise over the fact that Irfan Habib has not paid attention towards the possibilities of the capitalist development inherent in the village artisanship which was fulfilling the needs of the people. The proposition that in case the colonialism had not occurred, capitalist development would not have ensued in India is the one which negates the internal dynamics of society. Capitalism is the first universal and all-encompassing tendency which has the capacity to anyhow break or subordinate every kind of pre-capitalist structure. Whatever be the path and howsoever slow be the speed, once the tendency of the commodity production and that of labour power itself getting converted into a commodity sets in and the pace of the monetary relations and development of markets picks up, this tendency embraces the entire society to its fold by breaking all constraints of natural economy. **Had India not got colonised, the journey from artisanship to manufacturing which was beginning in India would have progressed,** the ever growing forces of production would have torn apart the pre-capitalist production-relations, the capital would have entered in every joint of the society, the clashes between the forces of production and production-relations and between base and superstructure would have precipitated in the form of class struggle, ultimately a new base would have been established and the new superstructure would have dominated the old decaying socio-

cultural superstructure. The caste-system too would have naturally decayed and disintegrated in this process. The colonialism destroyed this process and the caste system remained intact into the semi-feudal and semi-colonial base and superstructure with some changes.

The Essence of People's Monotheistic Movements: A Re-assessment

There is a need here to re-assess the people's monotheistic movement (Nirgun Bhakti Andolan). The leaders of this movement did not come from the privileged intellectual community within the caste system dependent upon the ruling class. They belonged to 'low' castes such as *Chhipi*, *Julaha*, *Chamar*, *Dhunia*, *Nai* etc. or to some 'low' caste of the small peasants. From the class perspective, their social base was amongst the landless agricultural labourers, artisans and small traders. Irfan Habib complains that none of the followers of the diverse religious sects of this movement ever considered themselves as peasants and they did not raise the socio-economic demands of any section of the peasantry. The peasantry belonging to one caste could not associate themselves with the peasantry of other castes and this hampered the development of class-consciousness in the peasantry. In this context, firstly we should note that this movement was not merely that of peasantry, it had multiple sub-streams. Various artisans and workers belonging to the lowest of the castes had joined it.

Their common issue was to attack the religious rites and rituals which used to provide base to the caste-system and which were determining the production-relations and which were the barbaric form of social oppression as well. Even in the European religious reformation movement, there was a liberal stream of Luther, the radical stream of Muntzer raised the demands of peasants as well and the Calvin stream used to represent the demands of the most radical emerging bourgeois class. After manifesting the bourgeois worldview in the beginning, Luther criticised the initial bourgeois humanism and the principle of free trade and took the side of the rulers in the great peasant wars of 1525. Religious peasant leader Munzer was the representative of the plebian peasant side and his political programme was very close to utopian communism. It is

true that the Maratha state established as a result of the revolt of Marathas against the centralised power was in no way a 'peasant state'. It gave rise to the reign of Maratha landlords, the *Meeras Pattedaris* got expanded and the conditions of *Kunbis* and the lower caste remained almost unchanged. In terms of egalitarianism and democracy, the character of the Sikh religion which gave voice to the revolt of the *Jat* peasants was most radical even though the Sikh state which came into being as its consequence was in no way a 'peasant state' and later on the Sikh religion too could not remain untouched from the caste based discrimination. But we will have to remember that even the European religious reform movement was later on being used by the princes of several princely state and by the feudal aristocrats of England, Scandinavia and France (against the authoritarian regime of king). Similar to the manner in which the 'counter-reformation' stopped the spread of the protestant religion by the mid sixteenth to seventeenth century in Europe, in India we find the *Sagun Bhakti* stream of Tulsidas providing logic in favour of a reformed caste-system, the greatness of Brahmins and the idol worship. It is not our aim here to search a replica of the people's monotheistic movement in the European religious reform movement. There were differences between them in accordance with the differences in the socio-economic structures. We only wish to clarify that there was an independent economic dynamics of the class-struggle in the pre-capitalist India in which the potential for a capitalist development did exist (in the event of India not being colonised) which could destroy the caste-system because there was an approximate overlapping between the caste-groupings and class-hierarchy in India at that time. It is quite possible that in case the India was not colonised, a socio-cultural movement carrying the values of humanism would have arisen from within the stagnation of the eighteenth century. Alternatively there was a possibility that the values of humanism, nationalism and revolutionary democracy would have developed along with the gradual progress of bourgeois development like what happened in Russia. In any case, the decay and disintegration of the caste-system would have been inevitable. It is not just a question of the re-assessment of the people's monotheistic movement, it is only in this light that it can be properly understood as to how the

colonialism killed the independent internal motion of the Indian society and gave a new strength to the the caste-system for it to become long-lasting.

The Caste-system in the Colonial Era.

European companies, when they arrived in India, used to sell the goods produced in India to the European markets. Soon the East India Company pushed behind other European companies in the wars and trade rivalry and it even started to control the territories of different parts of the country by taking advantage of the splits, clashes and weaknesses of the Indian feudal lords. After the battles of Plassey and Buxar, it became the biggest political power of the country. The primitive capital accumulation began to carried out in huge proportions for the British industrial revolution by plundering the immeasurable wealth of the kings and emperors, traders and money lenders. The despotic attitude with the artisans and craftsmen reached the level of plunder. Then arrived the phase in which the industrial revolution had moved a step ahead. The large-scale factory production could now defeat the Indian handicrafts in the competition. As the import of the British goods gained pace, the Indian handicrafts were destroyed. The cities like Dhaka and Surat were deserted. The process of ruralisation began on large scale and the pressure of population on agriculture increased. The agriculture was getting destroyed much earlier because the feudal lords were compensating for all the plunder of the company by extracting abnormally high rent. Even the company started extracting unfettered land revenue from the region under its rule. Soon they realised that the extraction of the land-revenue was an immeasurable source of plunder in this huge agrarian society, hence it was important to systematise it. This task was accomplished through the systems of Zamindari, Ryotwari and Mahalwari. These systems established a new semi-feudal class-structure by destroying the entire structure of the village communities, even though this change hardly made any impact on the basic structure of the caste-system. The Zamindari system made the land as the private property of the Zamindars. These new feudal lords were the 'upper' caste people who had to deposit 9/10th of the rent extracted from the tenant cultivators. The Zamindars used to side-step all the

rules and regulation while squeezing the tenants. The tenant cultivators mostly belonged to the middle castes. At the bottom were the people belonging to the Dalit castes who used to do *begari* on the self-cultivated land of the Zamindars, they used to serve them and they even used to work on the lands of the big tenants. Thus the caste-based social structure remained unchanged. Even though the colonial semi-feudal system destroyed the economic fabric of the village community, the caste-system remained prevalent, it just got articulated with the new system. The *Zamindars* often used to sell their right to extract land-rent to the Pattedars who in turn used to sell it to the sub-pattedars. These Pattedars used to put more and more pressure on the cultivators for enhancing their share and they used to force the Dalit to do *begari* by committing more and more atrocities. Even the *Pattedari* used to be hereditary. At times when the *Zamindars* could not pay the land revenue either due to the pauperisation of the peasants or because of their own luxuries, their *Zamindari*s used to be auctioned and which used to be purchased by the employees of the Company, the employees of the courts and the big money-lenders and thus they used to join the ranks of the new feudal lords. In Bengal and Bihar, majority of such landed property rapidly went to such urban rich who had surplus capital and who used to immediately invest it on land. Needless to say that the peasants who were getting destroyed, used to often rebel and such rebellions were brutally crushed.

Under the *Ryotwari* system, the British rulers provided recognised as landlord not only the *Zamindars* but the *Mirasdars* (those members of the village community who were entitled to the inherited property) and all those categories of peasants which were paying land-revenue directly to the state. At times the entire village used to come under a *Mirasdar* and its position used to become equivalent to that of a feudal lord. In many cases, the peasants who came from outside, the slaves and the untouchable artisans became tenants or sharecroppers without having any right and the rent on whose tenancy could be increased any time and who could be dispossessed any time. The English officers, by treating the land as the property of the state, started treating the *Ryots* as their permanent tenants with whom the rent could be arbitrarily

extracted and on whom the revenue could be imposed whimsically. Under the *Raiyyatwari* system the grazing land and the spare land which were earlier owned by the village community were seized by the state. The landless Dalits had to face its worst impact because they could no longer graze the cattle and nor could they get wood for cooking fire. Consequently, their dependence on the land-lords increased further.

Under the *Maujavar* or *Malguzari* system the entire village community was considered as a financial unit or landlord. But the tax was imposed on the individual farms and even if a single tenant defaulted in the payment of revenue, the land of the entire village used to be auctioned which were normally being purchased by officers of the courts and goods department and thus they used to acquire the status of *Zamindars*.

After the capture of Sindh in 1843 the *Ryotwari* system was imposed in the upper Sindh while in the lower Sindh, the *Zamindars* were accorded the status of the legitimate land-lords. After the victory of Punjab in 1845–48, the British did not bring about any change in the structure of the village community, even though the rich tenants were given the so called ownership of the community land (i.e. the permanent right to cultivate on their land provided they give the rent). Due to payment of rent in cash becoming mandatory throughout the Punjab the peasants were compelled to sell their produce in the market which led to the fall in the prices of food crops and thus the condition of peasantry started deteriorating and the influence of money-lenders kept on increasing. The Sikh feudal lords whose ownership rights had been strengthened turned into reliable social prop of the British colonialists.

In the eighth decade of the nineteenth century the ownership rights of the different sections of feudal land-lords were made completely privatised through new measurement and rent settlement. The methodologies of the land-revenue were streamlined. Most of the villages affected by the revolt of 1857 were returned to the *Tallukdars*. At the same time, those belonging to the upper echelons of the village community were accorded the status of sub-owners and brokers between the *Malguzars* and land-owners. In the areas of *Ryotwari Bandobast*, the small scale peasant ownership was also systematised apart from the feudal

land-ownership. In Punjab, the attention was paid to the interests of the upper echelons of the village community. The land ownership of the *Jagirdars* and *Inaamdars* were also curtailed and the *Tallukdars* were made the pensioners dependent on the state. In Sindh, although the owner *Jagirdars* were given property rights over the big lands but they were removed from the task of collecting rent. There was a curtailment in the numbers of the *inams* and *Jagirs* and in the landed property of the *Inamdars* and *Jagirdars*. In the central province, apart from the old feudal aristocrat, the right of land-ownership was also given to the *Malguzars* responsible for giving the land-revenue directly to the state. Through all these steps, on the one hand the British colonialism expanded and consolidated its social props by developing a new line of feudal lords besides the old ones and by giving rise to a loyal population and on the other hand it ensured the colonial feudal monopoly on land. Its main beneficiaries were the 'upper' caste feudal lords only. In some areas, the middle caste peasants benefitted to an extent and the tendency of 'Sanskritisation' developed among them. For most of the middle caste peasants and poor tenants and the landless labourers belonging to the Dalit castes and the remaining craftsmen, the inhuman exploitation and oppression continued unabated. Thus the new changes left the caste-system almost untouched.

The biggest social curse of the colonisation on Indian society was that while it maintained the the old evil of the caste-system through re-culturification, it destroyed the socio-economic structure of India and imposed the colonial socio-economic structure. The embryo of natural development which was developing inside the womb of the old society got destroyed. The possibilities of the natural path of the development of 'agriculture-handicrafts-manufacturing-machinofacturing' vanished. The caste-system was apt for the colonial semi-feudal mode of exploitation and it was an effective weapon for dividing the people at socio-political level and to blunt their class-consciousness (the other effective weapon was to promote communalism). Even in the era of national movement, the indigenous capitalist class was always fearful of the increase in the initiative of the toiling masses and it was conscious of its class interest right from the beginning.

Hence, despite using the people's power in the movements, it could not take the radical stand on the question of the elimination of the caste. On the contrary it was its usual tendency to exploit the distance and tensions between the castes and then to adopt the policy of intermixing, reform and 'Harijan upliftment'. Besides the Feudal lords, even the rich tenants of the middle castes (who used to get their farms cultivated by the Dalits) used to keep a distance from the Dalits and even the middle castes and poor tenants used to keep a distance from them. The untouchability and the notions of pure work and polluted work were present as it is. Ample documentary evidences exist to prove that it was a well-thought policy of the British law-makers not to interfere with the Hindu religion and the caste-system as it was the most important ploy to make the old ruling classes as associates and to escape the social upheaval. Secondly, the arbitrary extraction of the land-revenue was an important means of the colonial plunder which was possible only by maintaining the semi-feudal oppression of the land settlement and it was the main basis of the caste-based oppression.

1857: Some Important Questions Related to its Evaluation

It is pertinent here to talk something about 1857. This great revolt had occurred at such a juncture of history when the classes arising out of the colonial socio-economic structure were yet to take a definite form and shape and the class structure of the pre-colonial India had not yet been destroyed completely. There were some seeds of the consciousness of national liberation in this struggle, but it was mainly a resistance struggle of the old India. At some places, significant role was being played by the regional heroes belonging to the peasantry, Dalits and the tribals, but the **main leading force was the feudal lords only**. The **main forces of the struggle were the rebel soldiers (who were the sons of peasants), peasantry and uprooted craftsmen**. The colonialism was their common enemy. In absence of a definite plan this battle could not be won on the old ground and it died its natural death on its own ground through natural process of negation of the negation. This was such a loss which is to be compensated till this day. If Jotiba Phule, while looking at the recent past of the feudal oppression of the old India, could not view 1857

from a balanced historical perspective, the reason was very natural. He was of the opinion that the victory of the rebels would bring back the old Peshwa rule and the brutal oppression of the Dalits. But even today, most of the Dalit intellectuals and some Marxist intellectuals consider the revolt of 1857 as having regressive nature on account of its feudal leadership. It is an extremely metaphysical perspective towards history. Even if the colonialists were defeated in this great battle, it was not possible that India would have receded into the darkness of its medieval past. After the defeat of the British rule, the possibility of the restoration of a strong centralised feudal rule was very rare.

The Class Structure of the Colonial Era, Various Political Streams and the Caste Question

All the voices being raised against the evils of Hinduism and all the movements being waged by taking inspiration from the ideals of democracy in the European society by the first generation of the educated middle class which was born out of the British colonial socio-economic structure were confined to the urban middle class and their outlook towards the urban poor did not go beyond mercy and compassion. In fact, the majority of these reformers were the landlord themselves and leave aside the improving the lot of the Dalits, they like other landlords were their oppressors. But Jotiba Phule was class apart. Not only was his stance radical against the caste-system at the level of propaganda, he also strived to build institutions for the education of the untouchables and women. He consistently opposed the atrocities and exploitation of the peasants and untouchable landless labourers at the hands of *Deshmukhs*. However, even this radical social reformist could not see the colonial rule as the builder and protector of the semi-feudal land system, rather he viewed it as a benefactor of the *Shudras* and untouchables. The *Satyashodhal Samaj* being established by Phule later on fell into the leadership of Shahuji Maharaj, a feudal lord whose main aim was to get recognised as *Kshatriya*. But a small section of this organisation was involved for some days in organising the peasants and workers. In 1890, Lokhande, a follower of Phule, built a workers' organisation named 'Bombay Mill Hands Association', although it was an informal (without any

rule) organisation made for the improvement in the condition of the workers. Lokhande was also a member of the 'Factory Labour Commission' formed by the government.

The urban Dalit population was impressed with the day to day behaviour of the Christian British masters as they did not practice untouchability, even though they used to get the job of watchman, gardener, cook and servant. Their kids were not discriminated in the Missionary schools. They also used to go to the government schools, but they had to face insult there. After getting education from these schools, a population of educated Dalits also came into being (particularly in Maharashtra) which used to get the jobs upto the clerical level. Yet, they mostly used to get the lower level jobs in the cities. Sanitary work was assigned to them only. Even in factories, they used to get the lowest level of jobs and they had to face discrimination at the hands of the non-Dalit castes. In the entire country, there was only one Mahar regiment which was of Dalits, in all other regiments, the Dalits used to mostly get the non-soldier works like cleaning etc. Even these extremely limited changes were confined to hardly two percent of the Dalit population. The majority of the Dalit population which was living in the villages still suffered from the exploitation and oppression under the feudal system as before. Leaving aside some rich tenants, the situation of caste-based discrimination and oppression apart from the feudal exploitation remained prevalent even for middle-caste tenants and landless people, although their condition was different from that of Dalits and even they used to keep a distance from Dalits and nurse the feeling of hatred towards them (leaving aside some extremely backward castes). The Dalit political leadership which was articulating the interest of the small Dalit middle class which arose in the colonial India, put forward its claim for the entire Dalit population and gained their support by making the caste-based oppression as an issue. But it neither gave any economic and political programme against the root of the caste-system viz. the land-system nor did it target colonialism which was the protector of the land-system. We will discuss about Ambedkar and Periyar in this context at the appropriate place.

It was the bourgeois rationality which formed the philosophical basis of the uniform nationwide system of law and order, education

and administration being established by the British colonialists. But it was hampered, controlled and distorted in innumerable ways owing to the narrow colonial interests. The basis of the administration and law was no longer the caste-system and the divine sanction, but the caste-system was left untouched in the social life (we have already discussed as to how it was given a new economic base through land-system) because the social unrest in its wake could have threatened the very survival of colonial rule. The colonialists chose to develop their social props from within the ex-rulers themselves. The successor of the old land-owners, the new urban middle class, was adjusted in the bureaucracy. They even dominated the independent intellectual professions. In due course, if the nationalist feelings and ideas grew from within a section of this middle class itself, it was due to the contradictions inherent in the objective motion of the social development which remains independent of the will of the ruling class. Although even these nationalist ideas were either the feeble reformist ideas or they entailed the elements of revivalism and traditionalism. Instead of the militant democratic ideas, their ideas were either reformist or extremely conservative. A revolutionary nationalist stream also developed from the middle class when the social-development progressed further and a section of them even joined the working class by adopting the scientific socialism. But, even these streams carried so many birth-marks of the colonial social structure that their theoretical basis was too weak.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the British capital investment began in Railways and textile and Jute mills. Its main aim was to use the Indian raw material to manufacture goods at low cost in India itself and thereby maintain their lead in the competition of the world market. The second important sector was the construction of irrigation canals in those areas where the crops were grown for export (e.g. cotton and wheat farming in Sindh and Punjab). The mining industry became the third sector for investment and the plantation of tea, coffee and rubber became the fourth sector. The next phase was that of the steel factories, other infrastructural industries and the factories producing consumer goods. Unlike in Europe, the labour-supply needs of these factories were not met with the population uprooted due to the capitalist

development in the villages. The British industries continued to get the cheap labour power which was much cheaper than that in Europe from the destroyed artisans of handicrafts, the Dalit population suffering from the feudal oppression, the bankrupt small peasants and the victims of hunger and famine caused by the continuation of the colonial plunder. It did not have any impact on the caste-based social system of the villages. Along with these industries, the indigenous middlemen, traders, moneylenders and commission agents also accumulated a lot of money. Often they were Marwadi, Parsi, Gujrati and Jain traders. Afterwards, these comprador capitalists started investing in the ancillary enterprises of the British industries. Gradually, their character started changing. Taking advantage of the involvement of the colonialists in the world capitalist competition and crises, the first world war, the economic crisis and then in the second world war, the Indian industrial capitalist class expanded its industries and its aspiration for the competition in the market got a fillip. Like every capitalist class, the nationalism of the Indian capitalist class also got originated in the market. This capitalist class did not evolve through the phases of agriculture-handicrafts-manufacturing but it started as a comprador and trader from within the colonial socio-economic structure and later on developed as industrial capitalist class. The logic of Renaissance and Enlightenment and militant democracy did not belong to its heritage. Its path was not that of bourgeois democratic revolution, not even that of a militant national liberation struggle. It chose the path gaining political independence by adopting the strategy of pressure-compromise-pressure in accordance with its increasing power and by taking advantage of the inter-imperialist rivalry and the crisis of colonialists. In the process it suppressed the people's initiative and betrayed the people by pushing the mass struggle towards compromises at every step. It was not a coincidence that the leadership of its principal party the Congress consisted of the representatives of the upper caste landlords and rich tenants apart from the urban middle class. It was not a coincidence that the social ideas of its leading theoretician Gandhi were extremely orthodox, he used to call himself as a *Sanatan* Hindu and a strong supporter of the reformed *varnashram* system, his programme towards Dalit did not go beyond the

welfare of the untouchables, his secularism did not go beyond the Hindu-Muslim brotherhood. His humanism was sugar-coated with religion and immersed in the filth of revivalism. In this sense he was much behind his teachers—Ruskin, Thoreau and Tolstoy—their “Sanatan Hindu” follower. *Gram Swarajaya*, opposition to machine culture, upliftment of the untouchables, the Gandhian utopia of trusteeship were all geared towards involving the poor into the national movement and to apply balm on the wounds of the untouchables, it was aimed at weakening the pressure of the class struggle and thereby placing the masses behind the bourgeois leadership. When implemented, it could only take the form of capitalism and the same happened later in the leadership of Nehru. The Congress, on the one hand, used to assure the peasants of carrying out land-reforms and on the other hand, it used to guarantee the land-owners of safeguarding their interests. Its attitude towards the working class struggle was always that of opposition, pressure for the sake of compromise and that of betrayal. Such a political party of such bourgeois class could never adopt a radical economic program (anti semi-feudal land system) which could attack the roots of the caste system, nor could it build a militant democratic social movement against it.

The Communist Stream During the National Movement

The other main stream of the national movement was that of the Communist Party. Hence it is pertinent to know its standpoint and conduct on the caste question. In order to clearly understand this, it is important to know as to what were its weaknesses due to which the Communist Party of India could not become the leading stream of the national movement and could not accomplish the task of the people’s democratic revolution. The ideological basis of the communist movement was weak in India right since the beginning (we have discussed above the objective reasons inherent in the historical development) and this weakness continued to prevail. The declaration of the founding of the Party was made in 1920 in Tashkent and an All-India communist conference having very loose structure also took place in 1925. But even after this, the communist groups active in various parts of the country could not

be organised under a centralised leadership. The dull leadership at the time, instead of determining an anti-imperial and anti-feudal programme and path of revolution in India by examining the concrete condition, mostly used to take decisions and actions on the basis of India-related articles published in ‘Impcore’—the main organ of the Communist International and in the letters of the Soviet Party and the articles written by Rajniram Dutt of the British Party. In 1933 a provisional central committee was founded for the first time for preparing a structure of a Leninist Party on the suggestion of the Communist International and the parties of China, Britain and Germany. It can be said that the initial process of the Party formation itself got completed in 1933. Even after this, the first congress of the Party was held in 1943, i.e. after ten years. The irony was that even at that time the Party did not have a programme of revolution nor did it have any agrarian programme. In 1951 a policy statement and a document for programme was released by the Communist leadership for the first time after a dialogue with Stalin and the representatives of the Soviet Party in Moscow which was passed in the All India Party Conference in 1951 and the third Party Congress in 1953. **Despite being mainly and essentially correct about the path and general orientation of the revolution, the evaluation of this programme about the character of the Indian capitalist class and the State and the transformation of the agrarian relations and general orientation of the social development were not in tune with the reality as was clearly proved later.** Anyhow, this programme was only for keeping in the cold storage now because after the defeat of the Telengana struggle the Party had now taken full steps towards revisionism and had by now become an open parliamentary Party. In 1956 it also got the international certificate from the Khrushchevite revisionism.

It was because of this ideological weakness that the Party repeatedly missed the favourable opportunity during the national movement and failed to grab the leadership of the mainstream of the national movement from Gandhi-Nehru’s Congress. In the decade of 1920 when Gandhi was yet to regain his lost reputation and the compromising character of the Assemblist Swaraj Party was exposed, when it was the period of forming the Workers and Peasants Party and the rapid expansion of its influence, the Party

was not so organised and equipped with clear understanding to take the advantage of the situation. The inability of the Party to organise a nationwide exposure and mass mobilisation against the Gandhi-Irwin pact and the subsequent Government of India Act of 1935 was also due to its organisational weaknesses. Subsequently, during the P.C. Joshi's period of right-wing deviation the Party missed several opportunities to take the initiative in its hand. In absence of a dialectical policy towards the united front, it was natural to have a compromising attitude towards the bourgeois national leadership. When the provincial governments of Congress and League were causing widespread disillusionment among masses, the Party could have moved to organise a mass movement and take the initiative in its hand. But it was not to be. The most unfortunate was the transition period between 1946 to 1950 when on the one hand the Indian bourgeois parties, the Congress and the League, were engaged in the negotiations for the transfer of power, the constituent assembly representing merely 11 percent elites was preparing the constitution and on the other hand it was also the period of nationwide workers' strike, naval revolt, the indications of the brewing of revolts even in the Army and Air Force and most importantly it was the period of the great peasant struggles of Telengana, Tebhaga and Punapra-Vayalar. Small and big peasant revolts were taking place even in other parts of India. Had there been an organised Leninist Party in the true sense, the country's history would have been different. But it was the same period when Ranadive was on the one hand implementing the "left" adventurist line and on the other hand he was building castle in the air by borrowing the idea from the Yugoslavian revisionist Cardelz to merge the stages of democratic revolution and socialist revolution. The Dange faction in Bombay was already immersed in the mire of economism. The Andhra Party committee was relatively on the right track and was stressing on the nationwide spread of people's war on the pattern of China. But the central leadership rejected the 'Andhra Thesis'. In all these struggles of peasants and workers the communist cadres were in the leading front with their unmatched chivalry and sacrifice but there was a lack of central leadership which could make these struggles nationwide by joining the dots. Ultimately all the isolated struggles were either scattered or were

suppressed. Nehru sent the army to brutally suppress the Telengana peasant struggle.

Many Dalit intellectuals have been levelling the charge on the communist movement of ignoring the caste question (and at times of having caste-based prejudices as well) and these days such line of thinking has become prevalent amongst some Marxist nouveau-riche intellectuals as well. Even some communist revolutionaries, while saying this, are presenting different shades of the harmonisation between Marxism and Ambedkarism without going in detailed analysis as if to obtain absolution of past sins, as if they would win the hearts of the Dalit population just by doing this. This is either defeatism or cheap populism. It is not that the Communist Party did proper theoretical work and systematically decided the policy and strategy on the other aspects of the Indian society and other problems of the revolution and it only ignored the caste question. How can one expect a Party to have a complete position document and clear direction only on caste question when it did not even have a programme for Indian revolution and an agrarian programme till 1951? So the weakness of the communist movement were just a part of its larger weakness related to the programme of Indian revolution. Yet it needs to be mentioned that in its document on the 'United Front for action' in 1930, the Party has discussed the caste-system and untouchability in detail, it linked the anti caste-system struggle with the struggle against feudalism and the British rule and it appealed the toiling "untouchable" masses to stay away from the conspiracy of dividing them on caste lines and to fight against feudalism and colonialism along with the workers throughout the country. At the same time it has declared to fight against the caste-system and all sorts of caste-based inequality. Again this question has been raised in the paper on the political thesis in the second congress of the Party in 1948 and five paragraphs have been devoted to the problem of untouchability. In this document it has been said to the untouchables that along with carrying out uncompromising struggle against the "upper" caste bourgeois class they must also carry out struggle against those opportunist and separatist leaders who separate the untouchables from these struggles by taking the side of the exploiting classes. Clearly, apart from other Dalit leaders of Congress and Periyar it is

mainly Ambedkar who is being alluded to here. Subhash Gatade (see his article ‘Caste Away Caste: Breaking New Grounds’) and many others are quite hurt that the Communist Party while talking about fighting untouchability declared Ambedkar as separatist, opportunist and British supporter without even giving a concrete programme for elimination of caste and it created caste-based prejudices. The fact that the Communist Party did not present a concrete programme for the elimination of caste is a separate issue. Even Ambedkar did not provide any such programme which will be discussed later. But how could one turn a blind eye to the reality at that time. While opposing the ‘upper’ caste leadership of the Congress, Dr. Ambedkar did not organise the Dalits on their demands against the “upper” caste Zamindars, nor did he do this against the British, their patron. He kept a distance from anti-colonial struggle, continued to oppose the gaining of independence and while sitting in the Constituent Assembly representing 11 percent of the elites with the support of League and then of the Congress, he was making the Constitution and was expressing lavish obligation towards the Congress (see, his speech in the Constituent Assembly) at a time when Nehru Government was brutally repressing peasants and landless labourers in Telengana. We will evaluate his role in totality separately, but in 1948 how else could one describe him if not opportunist and separatist? What was required to take along the Dalits was not to embrace Ambedkar by whitewashing the reality but to derive the concrete tasks of the prolonged struggle for the elimination of untouchability and the caste-system within the task of the democratic revolution. The Communist Party failed to do this and this was its lacuna. Also, It is important to mentioned here that even AITUC had made untouchability and caste-based discrimination as an issue in its fourth–fifth–sixth conferences and even later it was included in the ‘charter of the workers’. The central council of the Kisan Sabha also included the anti-untouchability demand in its charter of 1945. These facts should not be ignored outrightly, but it in no way means that there was no lacuna or weakness. The Communist Party failed to present an outline of the concrete strategy on the caste question in the stage of the democratic revolution while undertaking the Marxist analysis of the social bases of the origin of the caste system

and its presence till the colonial era and the inter-relationship between the caste and the class; it did not give perpetual, widespread and systematic programme against the caste-based social divisions and the culture of discrimination, nor did it tell as to what would be the process or general orientation of the complete abolition of the caste after the establishment of the proletarian state! This weakness was not a separate and isolated one; rather it was due to the ideological weakness due to which the Party did not have any programme of revolution till four years after 1947.

But we will do justice with history only if we do not ignore the other side of the picture. Despite the weakness of ideology and line, communists fought valiantly against the oppression and discrimination of the Dalits and other oppressed castes in the twentieth century in all the areas where they had influence. No one else did it better than them. The upper-caste land-owners in fact contemptuously use to term them as “the party of Chamars and Dusadhs (the Dalit castes)”. The main base of the communists was actually among the landless labourers of villages most of whom were Dalits. In the Kisan Sabhas, the tenant farmers used to go along with the communists as they were the ones who used to raise their demands militantly (although among the landlord farmers, the Congress had more influence). But even the tenants used to consider them as more friendly towards the Dalits. The communist organisers carried out the movements against the discrimination or oppression against the Dalits at hundreds of the places in the country. The tradition of the professional revolutionaries was in existence till 1952–52 in its true sense and such activists, even those belonging to an upper caste, used to live in the Dalit settlements only. This tradition was continued for some time even during the era of revisionism. It needs to be remembered that during their work in the Andhra Mahasabha while preparing the prelude for the Telengana peasant struggle, apart from other social evils the communists also raised the issues of caste-based discrimination, untouchability, the religious superstitions and the slavery of women and strengthened the class solidarity through the powerful social movements. Hence instead of making sweeping allegation on the communist movement, what is required is to go to root of the issue. The root

cause of the ideological weakness of the communist movement and it needs to be seen as that only.

The Stream of Ambedkar and Periyar

Now we move to the role of Ambedkar and Periyar during the national movement. Ambedkar had an exaggerated view of the possibilities of liberation of Dalits from their bondage to the caste-based profession owing to the opportunities got by a minuscule population of the Dalits due to the British education system and the development of industries and he had a hope that the condition of the dalits would change and the Brahmanic hold of the upper-caste would break if the British rule continued. He failed to understand this fact that all such steps could only produce a tiny section of the middle class among the Dalits and the naked caste-based oppression of the urban Dalits would be lessened to some extent. The majority of the Dalit population was the victim of the exploitation and oppression by the upper-caste landlords who were the products of the semi-feudal agrarian system being implemented by the British themselves. The emancipation of the wider Dalit community was impossible without the revolutionary attack on the roots of this agrarian system and Ambedkar never had any such programme. As regards colonialism, while he used to express extreme obligation towards it at times, at other times he used to express his anguish over the fact that the British did not do enough to improve the condition of the Dalits and while discussing famine, poverty and the plunder of the country he at times used to condemn the British policies for being an impediment in the development of industry and trade. However, even when he used to be bitter towards the British imperialism, his stand was that we could not fight two enemies together, so our immediate priority is to fight against Brahmanism. As regards the Congress leadership, he never discussed its bourgeois class-character; his objection was to the dominance of the upper-caste and particularly the Brahmins in it. Instead of identifying the roots of the caste-system inherent in the entire socio-economic structure, his prime understanding was that the participation of the Dalits in the state power could bring about change in their condition. As per his understanding, the end of colonialism would lead to the rule of Brahmanism and hence he

always stayed away from the national movement. If the Congress leadership was Brahmanic and the colonial rule was not in the interest of the Dalits, they could be organised against colonialism and feudalism on a radical programme as a separate stream; but instead of doing this, Ambedkar chose the alternative of mainly staying with the British through dialogue and negotiation by staying away from the national movement. Insofar as the social movement is concerned, all the projects of Ambedkar remained confined to minor anti-Brahmanic movements to seeking the solution of the caste-system in religious conversion.

At a time when people throughout the country were boycotting the Simon Commission, Ambedkar was filing petition before it. He was a nominated member of the Bombay assembly from 1926 to 1934. In the round-table conference he said that the Dalits had welcomed British as people who liberated them from the age-old atrocities of the orthodox Hindus and by fighting against the Hindus-Muslims-Sikhs they gave this empire to them (although it is factually wrong that the Dalits constituted the majority in the British army, they were very few in number), hence Dalits and Britishers are tied in an extraordinary bond and the Britishers were the protectors of the Dalits. (**Ambedkar, Collected Works, vol. 5, p. 16**). Later on, even when he was criticising the British colonialism, he was opposing the participation of the Dalits in the freedom struggle with the argument that this struggle was being waged for the establishment of the upper-caste Hindus.

Often some Dalit and neo-Marxist scholars give the proposition that the famous strike of the Bombay textiles mill in 1929 was broken because the union under the leadership of the Communists ignored the demands of the Dalit workers and hence they separated themselves from the strike. The facts need to re-checked. The strike was held because due to the introduction of new machines, three looms were being run by a single worker and the workers were being laid-off. The Dalit workers were with the strike. It is true that there was discrimination with the Dalit workers in the mill and they were not allowed to do certain kinds of works on the ground of untouchability. It is a separate issue that the Communist Party should have carried out a sustained work of education and propaganda on such issues as well and should also have presented

the demands before the management. But at a time when all the workers went on strike on an imminent crisis, Ambedkar insisted on adding the special demands of the Dalit workers and the Dalit workers went back to work due to which the strike was broken. Actually, as per his autobiographer Dhananjay Keer, Ambedkar used to consider the strikes as being inspired more by political motive than economic and this would have worsened the economic condition of the Dalits. He was a nominated member of the Bombay assembly from 1926 to 1934. Ambedkar was not a part of the nationwide protest against the infamous Government of India Act of 1935 also. He founded an Independent Labour Party for participating in the election held as per this act whose influence was confined to the Bombay province only. He sat in the opposition in the assembly. It was the only period when Ambedkar, who used to nurse extreme hatred towards the communists took part in the workers' and peasants' movement with them. He did not put any condition on the the issue the Dalit workers and this strike was won due to widespread solidarity of workers. On this occasion he gave statements in favour of the democratic rights of strike and he even went on to say that if the Congress really carries out anti-imperialist struggle, he would join it. But his radical gesture was short-lived. During the Second World War, as soon as it became apparent that the crisis-ridden British could leave India and go back and when 'Wavell Plan' was brought, Ambedkar dissolved the Independent Labour Party and built 'Scheduled Caste Federation' and prepared a proposal named 'State and Minority' which was later presented before the Constituent Assembly. In this duration, he acted as administrator of the Governor General in the labour department from 1942 to 1946. The talks of carrying out struggle against with the imperialism were left way behind. The new stand of Ambedkar was that the British should not leave Indian before doing proper arrangement for safeguarding the Dalits. This was the time when he became a staunch supporter of the division of India (later on his stand was changed and he toed the lines of the Congress), which not only pleased the British rulers and the Muslim League but Savarkar as well.

Ambedkar, an admirer of European-American democracy, did not bother to recall universal adult franchise when the election of

the constituent assembly was held under the Government of India Act of 1935 by an electorate of only 11 percent of the population and he became a member of the constituent assembly after being elected from Bengal with the support from the League. After the formation of Pakistan when the constituent assembly was divided, the Congress hurriedly got a seat vacated for Ambedkar and got him elected from Mumbai. The Congress made him the president of the drafting committee. Two bureaucrats prepared a draft on the basis of the Government of India Act 1935 and Ambedkar prepared the final draft by decorating the same. Reading the speeches of Ambedkar is an interesting experience in itself. He is seen overwhelmed with a sense of gratitude and unity with the Congress, he lavishly expresses gratitude even to the conservative members (which included even the representatives of the feudal elites) of the assembly. It is noteworthy that while Ambedkar was busy preparing the draft of the constitution, a nation-wide mass-uprising was taking place throughout the country, workers' movements were unfolding, the peasant struggles of Telengana-Tebhaga-Punapra-Vayalar were going on and it was the same duration in which the army, sent by Nehru, was carrying out brutal and bloody repression of the Telengana struggle. The *raiya*ts and landless people against whom the goonda gangs of landlords, Razakars of Nizam and the Indian army carried out wild atrocities in Telengana mostly belonged to the Shudra and Dalit castes. But Ambedkar was not seeing anything, nor was he listening, nor saying anything; he was writing the constitution and was gracing the post of law minister in Nehru government. Most of the proposals presented by him before the constituent assembly were rejected by it and yet Ambedkar did not show any displeasure about it. It is the same constitution which guarantees to safeguard private property (how could property-less Dalits have benefitted from it?). It is the same constitution which also contains the provision to impose emergency by doing away with even the remaining space of democracy. The drama of electing the people's representatives through money-power which has today taken the most disgusting shape is also provided by the same constitution. The constitution also contains the provision of ending untouchability (and in 1955 a law was also made to this effect), but it was merely on paper. The

reduction in untouchability which has taken place so far is not due to constitutional or legal provision, but it is due to the autocentric motion of the capitalist development. Ambedkar was in total agreement with the provision of giving compensation to the rulers of princely states for taking over their property and that of privy-purse. For all the hypocritical claims of democracy in the constitution, the common people have to face the law and order machinery in their day-to-day life and the Indian bourgeoisie has kept the colonial structure of the law enforcement machinery (IPC, CrPC, Jail Manual, Police Manual, property related laws etc.) intact (later on the newer draconian laws kept on adding one after another).

The system of taxation, right from the beginning, was such that the capitalists could derive benefits from it as per their convenience and most of the burden of governance falls upon the people by way of indirect taxation. Being a law minister himself, Ambedkar did not have any objection to any such issues. The reason for Ambedkar's falling out with the Congress was not theoretical, what actually happened was that he wanted labour ministry instead of law ministry and Nehru did not fulfil his wish even after waiting for long. Subsequently, Ambedkar tendered his resignation in 1955. Now, going totally against his speeches in the constituent assembly, he started discussing about his compulsions during the making of the constitution and the constitution suddenly looked so worthless to him that he announced, 'I shall be the first person to burn this constitution.' In the last days of his life he announced the formation of Republican Party (which came into existence after his death). Even this new party did not have any radical socio-economic programme. Its programme was merely to show the day-dreams of changing the condition of the Dalits by enhancing their stake in the ruling establishment through election. It is not surprising that it was on the basis of this very logic of participating in the ruling establishment, the numerous factions of the Republican Party and the myriad Ambedkarite parties which arose later did not exhibit any hesitation in aligning with any of the parties from time to time be it Congress, 'Hindutvavadi' fascist BJP, Shiv Sena, SP—a party of the middle-caste kulaks and farmers which happens to be the oppressor of the Dalits and the parties of kulaks and regional land-

owners such as DMK and AIADMK. In fact, these parties represent the interests of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois class which has emerged out of the Dalits who manage to get the Dalit votes in the name of caste and Ambedkar but who have nothing to do with the interests of the majority toiling Dalit masses. The conduct of these parties is not a deviation from the path of Ambedkar, rather its logical culmination and extension.

Ambedkar's economic policies, with the rubric of state socialism (see, his proposals before the constituent assembly), was not even Fabian Socialist. It contained some utopian proposals and the rest of which was in no way different from the so-called socialism of Nehru which was a mixed form of state capitalism and private capitalism—the mixed economy capitalism. Ambedkar's proposal was that all the major industries and insurance would be owned by state and the basic industries would be owned by the state corporations. The whole of agriculture would be nationalised. But he did not forget to add that while taking over the factories and land of the capitalists and land-owners, due compensation would be paid. The small enterprises would be privately owned. The state farms would be given to the families of villages on lease without any discrimination. Firstly, in this system interest, rent and private ownership was to remain unchanged, only the biggest individual owner was to be the state. Even an average student could tell that this would be nothing but state monopoly capitalism. Instead of ending the system of exploitation, it would have exacerbated it, would have created a powerful group of bureaucrat capitalists, would have given the opportunity even to the small enterprises to grow bigger and would have paved the social base for an autocratic totalitarian state. The Dalits would have continued to be wage-slaves in the proposed state enterprises and farms. Insofar as making agriculture as the state enterprise, even the capitalist class wishes for the same, but its state cannot do it because the closest allies of the capitalist class and the small partner of the state—the kulaks-farmers-landlords—would never want that to happen. The “state socialism” of Ambedkar, who was previously influenced by rabid anti-communist American thinker John Dewey (he had been his student as well), transformed in 1952 (in the election manifesto of the Schedule Caste Federation) and came even closer to the

Deweyian pragmatism. Now he was of the view that the rapid industrial development was necessary, the state control should be applied wherever it is better and the private ownership should be promoted wherever it is effective. The utopian idea of the nationalisation of agriculture was abandoned and now Ambedkar took exactly similar stand as Nehru on the economic policies. Even if Ambedkar had not said, the capitalist class was eager to carry out rapid industrial development at any cost. The caste-system was weakened to the extent as was possible as a consequence of the autocentric motion of capital. But what is important is that capitalism articulated the caste-system as per its interests and embraced it by refining it, the oppression, alienation and humiliation of the majority Dalit masses continued unabated not only in villages but in the cities as well and a small bourgeois and middle-class Dalit population was co-opted in the system as a part of the ruling class and its social prop. We will discuss it further.

Ambedkar had unwavering faith in the western Bourgeois democratic system, his thinking could never cross its horizon. Even in that his ideals did not include Diderot, Voltair or Thomas Paine, nor Fabian socialist George Bernard Shaw. The list of his sources of inspiration spanned from Edmund Burke to the Pragmatist American thinker John Dewey. His understanding of a class-neutral democracy was in no way different from the logic of bourgeois political science. He failed miserably to understand that every democracy has a class-character. It is either bourgeois democracy or socialist democracy. Bourgeois democracy is a dictatorship of the bourgeois class over the majority masses and the proletarian democracy happens to be a dictatorship of the working class (with the support of other toiling classes) over the minority exploiters. He gets startled by the proletarian dictatorship as if it is a negation of democracy or an authoritarian rule of the Party. Reading his writings on Marxism, one gets convinced that apart from the superficial criticisms of the bourgeois sociologists and the quotations given in them he had not studied a even a single work of Marxist classics. The dictatorship of proletariat is not what he describes. He was not clear even on the difference between socialism and communism. Because of his lack of understanding of the class-character of the state he could not understand the fact that

if the agriculture and industries are nationalised while the class-character of the state continues to be bourgeois then it would not be socialism but state monopoly capitalism; nor could he understand the fact that only by forcible overthrow of the state of one class that the other class can establish its rule. None of the ruling classes in history have transferred power peacefully. Violence in a revolutionary class war is a necessity, not a wish of anybody. When communists talk of violence, they do not mean individual violence but class violence, it is to forcibly smash a state which is established by force, operated by force and maintained by force (even if this process does not entail bloodshed, it would amount to violence in the philosophical sense). Similarly Ambedkar, despite being an economist, did not have any idea about the Marxist interpretation of the processes of commodity-production, surplus-appropriation or capital accumulation. He was not even aware of the dialectics between the economic base (total sum of the production-relations) and super-structure, qualitative leap during the constant struggle between the forces of production and production-relations and the definition of social revolution as the establishment of new production-relations as a consequence of the rupturing the production-relations by the forces of production. Like a casual scribbler he levels a charge of economic determinism on Marxism—which incidentally evolved during the struggle against economic determinism, a product of mechanical materialism—and says that Marxists consider human being as merely economic animal. What Marxism says is only this: the productive activities are fundamental activities of human beings for which they bind themselves in production-relations. It is the total sum of these production-relations which forms the base of society on which the huge edifice of super-structure of political-ideological-cultural-social institutions gets erected. Once built, the super-structure has its independent motion, on its turn it also influences the base and its clash with the new base and the new super-structure goes on. Throughout the period of socialist transition various forms of capitalist base remain and constant struggle with the old superstructure also goes on along with the long process of continuous transformation. Because of not being aware of this proposition, Ambedkar, in an article written in *Janta* in 1938, made

a childish comment that if the edifice of cultural and religious factors rests on the economic base, first the edifice needed to be broken in order to destroy the base. Even this criticism is made without having an understanding. Even communism talks of smashing the central political super-structural institution—the state—first in order to destroy the economic base and constant struggle needs to be waged against all religious-legal policies, values-beliefs and the institutions along with the struggle and politico-economic propaganda till the time people’s consciousness is raised and organised to the stage of smashing the state. Marxism only says that any superstructural system can be smashed completely and finally only when its economic base is broken down. Marxism only says that ultimately the decisive factor is the base. We will return to this discussion later. Ambedkar considers religion to be necessary in any civil society by dismissing the conception of human being as merely an “economic animal”. This “civil society” of Ambedkar is behind not only with the conception of the civil society by Hegel but also that of Locke and Rousseau which was an idealised form of the state of rationality and used to outrightly reject the presence of religion in the socio-political space. In fact, Ambedkar was not even aware of the thinking of the militant materialist bourgeois thinkers before Marx about formation of religion in definite circumstances and about the history of religion. He used to consider religion as something above humans, eternal guiding principle and was ignorant of its social origin. On this matter he was as conservative as Gandhi. He was only looking for a better religion than Hinduism and finally he zeroed down to a 2000 year old primitive Buddhist religion. He did not go towards the anti-Brahmanic ancient materialistic philosophies like Ajivaks, Lokayat or Sankhya because they were not organised religion. It was Ambedkar’s spiritual bankruptcy that he used to consider religion as the only spiritual wealth. Far from treating man as only “economic animal”, Marxism considers a man who is devoid of spiritual wealth as not fulfilling the criteria of being human and its aim is that the social structure needs to be destroyed in which the majority toiling population is deprived of the spiritual wealth owing to being fully engrossed in toil just for the sake of survival and on the other hand even the parasite classes who are devoid of the

natural human characteristic of labour have only a degenerated culture of lust and luxury on the name of spiritual wealth. Marxism considers culture, art-literature, music, philosophy as spiritual wealth, the human essence. Had he read the works of Marx-Engels such as 'Economic and Philosophical manuscript of 1844', 'Holy family', 'German Ideology', 'A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy' ('Grundrisse' was not published in his lifetime), had he been familiar with the references occurring here and there in 'Das Capital', had he been aware of even one hundredth part of the works on the theory of linguistics, literature, art, music etc. till 1950 by dozens of people ranging from Lenin, Stalin, Mao to Gorky, Lunacharsky, Brecht, Lukacs, Vorovosky, Voronski etc. and the experiments in the field of socialist art-literature-music-cinema, his views about the spiritual wealth of Marxism would not have been so shallow.

What after all was Ambedkar's project of Dalit emancipation? Rapid industrialisation. That even capitalism would want, but it could not do so by breaching the frontier of the theatre of history and the strength of capital. Whatever it could do, it has done in last 60 years. What is the outcome? Ten percent of the Dalits have been elevated to middle-class (even they have to face social-segregation and alienation), some became the social props of the system and 90 percent of the Dalit population is condemned to do wage-slavery and face caste-based discrimination, segregation, humiliation and oppression, the only difference is that the situation has improved a bit. We are faced with a refined caste-system with the capitalist character. **Whatever be the improvement, it is not only due to industrialisation, but reservation also has a role in it.** It was indeed a contribution of Ambedkar. When the demand of reservation was first made and when it was implemented, it was a bourgeois democratic demand looking at the conditions of Dalits (and even the backward castes). Today reservation has become a labyrinth. Most of the clashes for the distribution of reservation are taking place between the Dalits and backwards, between the various castes and sub-castes among the Dalits and among the castes considered to be backward. That too in the era of neo-liberalism when the government jobs are continuously getting curtailed. In the sixty years, reservation has made ten percent of the Dalits as middle-

class and two percent among them as upper middle-class and bourgeois class. Now the reach of reservation is confined to them only and this is the section which even though causes much furore against Dalit oppression but it has gone away from the rest ninety percent of the Dalit population after being co-opted by the system or by becoming the social prop of the system. Every capitalist system carries out this process of co-option and expansion of its social-props. Often reservation is opposed from the upper-caste mindset, but when reservation in itself dominates the agenda of Dalit emancipation and begins to divide them on the name of false hope, one would have to admit that it has become a tool of maintaining bourgeois democratic illusions rather than a bourgeois democratic demand. Reservation today is a non-issue, it needs to be replaced with 'education to all, employment to all' on the agenda of the Dalit emancipation. Till now we were talking about the reservation in the jobs. Insofar as the reservation in the government machinery (in the election seats) , it is a reactionary anti-Dalit demand. When a few Dalits enter the parliament and government, what happens is that they become the cogs of the bourgeois state, they could not carry out even the radical reforms for the Dalits by breaching the overall framework.

Insofar as the project of the elimination of the caste-system is concerned, Ambedkar never had a thorough idea about it. His famous essay of 1936 'Annihilation of Caste' is a maze of contradictory things whose ultimate conclusion is that the annihilation of caste is impossible. He says that in every country the intellectual class remains the most dominant class and among Hindus it constitutes only Brahmins who would not be ready for its elimination at any cost. Even the secular Brahmins, owing to their familial links would not stand against the priestly Brahmins. Even the other castes of the Hindu society would not be ready for ending the caste-system. Then he proposes the inter-caste marriage as its cure, but since it is contrary to the religious principles and beliefs, it would not be possible without freeing people's mind from the yoke of religion and holy books. Towards this task, Ambedkar does not suggest any cultural movement, instead he says that elimination of caste system is almost impossible and it would take ages for it. The only way out of this is to wait for ages. Till then we need to put

pressure within the existing system itself for some reliefs and concessions and wait for the lessening of the influence of the caste-system along with the capitalist development (industrialisation).

He also considered religious-conversion as one of the solutions and in his last days he became a Buddhist. Although very few Dalits followed him but there was no improvement in the social status of even those who followed him, they ended up forming a category of the 'Neo-Buddhist' within the Dalit caste. Ambedkar did not take anything from the materialistic outlook of the Buddhist religion as regards the relation between man and nature, but like a devotee he discussed in detail its metaphysical idealistic narratives as regards individual and social code of conduct. It is in no way clear as to what would be the difference in the social status of the Dalits if they conduct themselves according to the *Ashtang Marg* of Buddha. He was not aware of this fact of history that even Buddhist and Jain religion had a role to play in the degraded social status of the untouchables and they too used to give recognition to the secondary social status of peasants, slaves and women. Later on even the rulers who embraced these religions were no less oppressors. We are not sure whether Ambedkar's attention was drawn to the fact that the fascist (and today's imperialist) Japan, China before revolution and other Buddhist countries did not remain behind any other capitalist country in the capitalist plunder, injustice and misconduct. It was a strange contradiction of Ambedkar that while on the one hand he was a staunch supporter of the democratic system and constitutionalism of the western countries, a follower of Edmund Burke and John Dewey, on the other hand he ultimately saw the solution of the most important social problem in the 2000 year old religion of the era of ancient republics. It is not possible here to discuss the entire historical-outlook of Ambedkar, but what could be certainly said that he was miles behind not only the historians of the age of revivalism—Thiery, Minye, Guizot and Thiers but also Diderot, Voltaire and Rousseau who were born 150 years before his time. In other words his historical outlook was nothing more than a vulgar idealism and speculation. Instead of investigating the material basis of the production-relations he believes the endogamy (intra-caste marriage) to be the root of the caste-system which was started by the Brahmins (which means they existed before the caste-system). Similarly, he

explains the reason for the emergence of the caste-system to be the degeneration of the Aryan civilisation. He does not proceed to explain the reason for the fall of Buddhist religion and simply concludes that after the victory of the Buddhist religion the rule of Brahmanism and caste-system were firmly established. We have discussed above the history on this question from the Marxist perspective. Here we only wish to clarify that in the fields of history, philosophy, politics and economics, Ambedkar's thought process was unoriginal, non-serious, full of contradictions and mostly incorrect. He was mainly and essentially a bourgeois reformist (to say this is not to insult him but to determine the category of his thoughts), a committed constitutionalist, he believed the great men and intellectuals and not the masses to be motive force in the making of history and he was not interested in exploring the definite science of the development of history because he did not believe that there are definite objective laws of social change. He indeed had a positive role in creating awareness among the Dalit population, in exposing the Congress leadership to an extent and in gaining a bourgeois democratic right like reservation in his time. But ignoring his negative roles would not help to serve the cause of the Dalit castes. Today it is the cause of ruling classes which is being served by making Ambedkar something beyond questions, by branding anyone to be anti-Dalit if he indulges in a rational debate on him and by making the "constitution-maker" Ambedkar to be a messiah. It is increasingly getting difficult to take any conversation on a revolutionary project of the caste-annihilation to the Dalit population, the Dalit population keeps on moving in the maze of reforms and the labyrinth of the bourgeois parliamentary politics and a tiny population of the Dalit intellectuals who are being co-opted by the state are playing an important role in this. The Marxist intellectuals and groups who, instead of going in the depth and details of the analysis of thoughts, are presenting varied schemes of the abstract mixture of Ambedkarism and Marxism by eclectically selecting some quotations from here and there or by undertaking confession in the Christian manner by cursing the communist movement itself, are the utopian people who dream of alluring everyone by blowing magic pipe. Then there are some cunning intellectuals who are serving a new recipe of identity politics. We will discuss about them further.

After ending the discussion on Ambedkar here let us move to the politics of Periyar who happened to be his contemporary. The entire political life of Periyar was extremely inconsistent. He started with the politics of the Congress Party in 1919 and he separated from it as a protest against the dominance of upper-caste mentality in the Congress leadership and it not waging a social movement against the social evils. He founded 'Atma Samman League' in 1926 and waged social movements against Brahmanism and social evils. He was a staunch atheist. He visited Soviet Union in 1936 and after returning he even carried out the propaganda of socialism with Singaravelu Shettiar. But after a few days he became an opponent of the national movement and started to believe the presence of the British imperialism to be favourable to the Shudras and Dalit castes and in 1934 he joined the British supporter Justice Party. Afterwards he founded 'Dravid Kazhagam'. Going against the fact of history, Periyar believed that Brahmins are the successors of the external aggressor Aryans while non-Brahmins belong to Dravidian origin. On 15th August 1947 he observed a day of condolence by commemorating the day of the establishment of the Brahmin rule and in 1957 he even burnt down constitution for being silent on the annihilation of caste. Periyar was a supporter of rationalism and he even used to talk about egalitarian society, but in practice his politics was confined to anti-north, anti-Hindi, anti-Brahmin and anti-religion. He used to raise the demand of separate Tamilnadu having more autonomy within the Indian union even before independence. However, the rational and atheistic thoughts of Periyar could not be effective at all in finding solution to the problem of caste-discrimination and in towards the emancipation of Dalits because his understanding of social contradictions was faulty and he did not have any concrete socio-economic programme. It was the reason why his political conduct was also full of contradictions. He extended his support to the Congress chief minister Kamraj who belonged to Nadar caste. When Anna Durai government of Dravid Munetra Kazhagam, which emerged out of the Dravid Kazhagam itself, came to power, he supported it. The first phase of the Periyar's political career was the time when Brahmins' social hegemony prevailed in the Tamil areas, but the economic prosperity was coming even to the non-Brahmin castes. It was from these castes that the rich owner

farmers-Kulaks and regional capitalists evolved after independence; the parties such as DMK and AIADMK used to represent these classes only and the politics of anti-north was helpful in putting pressure on the capitalists in power at the centre. The so-called Shudra castes among whom these parties had base were in no way behind the Brahmins in the oppression of Dalits. Subsequently several parties evolved out of these parties which had bases in different castes. These parties did not have any problem in indulging in manipulation and forging coalition among themselves and with the parties such as Congress and BJP. After getting disillusioned from them several smaller parties of Dalits emerged but they only played the role of being a tail to either the DMK alliance or AAIDMK alliance.

Capitalist Development in the Post-colonial India and the Caste-system

Indian capitalist class, born as it was from a colonial socio-economic structure and brought up as it was in the imperialist world, could not hamper the interest of imperialism beyond a point (even the most radical of the capitalist classes of the newly independent countries could not make a radical rupture with imperialism) nor could it carry out the bourgeois land reforms in a radical manner. From the British, it had inherited the administrative machinery and legal system of a unified country. It had also prepared a feeble constitution. Initially, the British imperial capital had more influence on it, but slowly it expanded its economic alternatives by taking advantage of the inter-imperialist rivalry and attempted to gain capital and technology on better conditions. Subsequently, it developed its own technology by Indianising the same technology. Due to the lack of capital with the capitalist class here and in order to lessen the pressure of foreign capital, it utilised people's hard earned money to erect the edifice of basic and infrastructural industries so that the development in private sector is expedited. This was the path of 'import substitution industrialisation'. The banks were nationalised to facilitating more and more capital to the capitalists. The path of raising huge sum of capital from the share market was paved along with the growth of the well off middle-class strata. When the strength of the capital of the capitalist class in India was enormously increased, the process

of selling the state enterprises at paltry sums ensued. This era of privatisation-liberalisation of Indian capitalism was indicative of its necessity, compulsion as well as its increasing confidence. In this era of neo-liberalism, even the crisis-ridden international capital had put pressure to end the protectionist policies. Indian capitalism on the one hand gave the open opportunity to the imperialists to take its share in the vast and continuously expanding Indian market and on the other hand it also gradually began to invest more and more outside the country in the globalised world market. The condition of the Indian capitalist class in the global capitalist system is that of a Junior Partner of the imperialists. It manages to get a small portion of the surplus extracted at the global level, but at the country level it remains the big stakeholder even today. It is standing in the ranks of such post-colonial countries that possess relatively more developed productive forces.

The character of the Indian capitalist class evolved in the historical conditions in such a manner that it could not make a decisive blow on the interests of the small and big land-owners by carrying out radical land reforms. Hence it implemented an Indian edition which was a mix of Germany's Junker-type transformation and Russia's Stolypin-type land-reforms. It gave opportunity to the old exploiters to change the modus-operandi of exploitation. The estates of the old kings and princes were taken over but their immeasurable wealth, forts-banglows and landed-property were left out. Besides, they were given privy-purses for two decades. It was on account of this wealth that the kings joined the ranks with the big capitalists as sleeping-partner either as the owner of the hotel or as big share-holder in the industries, or they became the capitalist landlords. The abolition of Zamindari was carried out at slow pace and the feudal landlords were given opportunity to transform their character from being rent dependent to bourgeois landlord who produces for the market, could save most of their land from ceiling or join the ranks of urban upper middle-class. A large section of even the erstwhile rich and medium tenants also became capitalist farmer-kulak after becoming land owner. Most of them belong to the middle castes such as Reddy, Kamma, Thever, Maratha, Jaat, Kurmi, Kushwaha, Sainthwar etc. As their economic condition improved, their Sanskritisation process moved forward.

In the bourgeois parties, the blocks of kulaks-farmers were formed and their parties came into existence at regional level. The caste played the most important role in preparing the mass base of such parties. In terms of oppressing the Dalits, the farmers of these middle castes (so called shudra castes) were much ahead of the bourgeois landlords belonging to upper-caste who were successors of the old feudal landlords.

The so called green and white revolutions on the one hand prepared the fertile ground for the entry of capital into villages and agri-business and on other hand provided ample opportunity to the capitalist landlord-kulaks of surplus appropriation as per the strength of capital. The agro-based and allied sector developed throughout the country. Even the urban rich invested the accumulated capital into agriculture. The tendency of capital-intensive modern agriculture moved forwards. The differentiation of the peasant population was intensified. The remaining traces of natural economy and local markets were finished and even the remotest corners of the country got attached with the national and international market. Even the old system of land-tenure which was prevalent in some places, did not become an obstacle in the path of capitalist development (as clarified even by Marx and Engels). If we see the character of rent, it has become totally capitalistic. The capitalism in agriculture has either broken various pre-capitalist structures or it has co-opted them. The sphere of the existence of the pre-capitalist remnants has been shrinking. This tendency has given way to labour migration from villages on a large-scale. For the industrial capitalists it became easier to buy labour-power at lower price. The hell-like labour colonies of the industrial metropolitan cities were flooded with adhoc, casual, daily-wage, contract and piece-rate workers and huge population of semi-proletariat.

Thus a mediocre, distorted-skewed capitalism was developed in India through an excessively painful path which either broke the various pre-capitalist formations in a gradual manner or subordinated and co-opted them. Such a capitalism was totally incapable of creating healthy democratic values and beliefs. Its democracy was itself extremely limited and distorted-skewed. This was the reason why it did not touch the pre-capitalist values and institutions. The Khap Panchayats and the Caste Panchayats

continued to exist and the shackle of orthodoxy continued to prevail in society. If they are weakened to some extent, it was not due to the conscious attempt by the state or the provisions of the constitutions but the independent objective motion of the capitalist development had a role in it. The interference of religion has not ended, it was merely loosened a bit. On the other hand some newer modern sects have arisen which are not only an effective medium of propagating superstitions and status-quoism but a medium of capital accumulation and investment as well. In the capitalist system the objective basis of religion is the invisible power of commodity production and even today religion is an extremely effective superstructural instrument aiding the political hegemony of the ruling class. But the question of the caste-system is not only linked to the superstructural plane. It is deeply entangled and articulated with the capitalist production-relations. The issue is not confined to being a feudal remnant or continued effectiveness of the feudal superstructure. A new economic base of caste-based values-beliefs and segregations-prejudices has been prepared.

This is because the capitalist production and distribution system has established its hegemony without breaking the casteist equation of the different sections of population. For instance, today the old upper caste people almost dominate the bureaucracy and the independent intellectual professions and caste becomes a bond for their unity for protecting their shared interest. As a reaction the officers-clerks and independent intellectuals belonging to the Dalit and backward castes organise themselves by making caste-based blocks. In the villages, the upper-caste capitalist land-owners and the middle caste Kulaks- farmers carry out caste-based mobilisation for suppressing the Dalit labourers and poor peasants. The biggest advantage they get from this caste-based mobilisation is that even the poor belonging to upper castes actively or passively tend to take side of the exploiters belonging to their caste. The Dalits too tend to stand behind the leader of a party inheriting Ambedkar's legacy for defensive unity on the question of their identity and self-respect.

The situation of the cities is slightly different. But the caste-based segregation exists there as well and also its material basis. The proportion of Dalits in the organised working class population having better living condition is quite less. Among the unorganised

workers they have significant presence and even there they have a monopoly over all the works considered to be unhygienic. Besides, they have to do most of the burdensome and low-paying jobs. Even in the government jobs, the sanitary workers are Dalits. The reservation has benefitted ten percent of the Dalit population but as one goes upwards in the job hierarchy their percentage gets reduced to one to two percent. Administration, army, police, judiciary and independent intellectual profession — everywhere the condition remains the same. If there is any community which stands at equivalent position, it is the muslim community whose majority is poor and most of them are involved in independent handicrafts.

Among the factory-workers, those belonging to upper and middle castes who have not yet been uprooted completely are in huge numbers. Whatever little farms they are left with, they somehow manage the loss-making agriculture through their wages. The shade of peasantry is clearly seen in the proletariat character of such workers and it also blunts its class-consciousness and maintains the casteist prejudices. Most of the Dalit workers are either completely uprooted from the villages or even if they are attached their family's condition in the village is that of rural proletariat or semi-proletariat. But the caste-based segregation and humiliation creates the consciousness of uniting on caste-basis even among them. Even in the cities, the residential apartheid of the Dalit castes is clearly visible although not to the extent as that in the villages. It is seen not only in the working class but in the middle class as well. **In the residential co-operative societies it is almost impossible for Dalits and Muslim to become their members.** Even in getting house on rent the biggest obstacle is that of caste (or religion) even in the metro cities.

The bourgeois parliamentary politics in India does not work on the a socio-economic programme but with the help of the open game of capital and some cheap populist promises or the wave of prevailing mood, but caste-based polarisation remains its most important pillar today. The bourgeois parties, through policies, do not serve any caste, but to the whole ruling class. They consist of small and big capitalists, blocks of kulaks and landlords, the kulaks and regional capitalists have their own regional parties as well, their

class-interest also clash with each other, but they have consensus on general bourgeois economic policies and the parliamentary system. But every big bourgeois party has leaders from various castes in order to take advantage of caste equations and candidates in the constituencies are chosen by looking at proportion of their caste in the population. Insofar as the parties representing the interests of the regional capitalists are concerned, their main vote bank rests with the middle castes. All the parliamentary parties which claim to represent the Dalits are extremely opportunistic parties at the policy level, the well-to-do Dalit middle class gets its place in their leadership, the Dalit bureaucrats and intellectuals give support to this or that party among them and they make the Dalit population which has been oppressed for millennia as their vote-bank on caste basis. These parties raise new hopes by adopting radical posture and are ready to make an alliance with the Congress, BJP or any party at an opportune moment. In the bourgeois politics of coalitions they play the role of weighing-stone of weighing machine to be put on this side or the other side. The logic of overcoming the social status of oppression and humiliation on the basis of share in power has reached to this level in the last sixty years; let the ideological vendors of identity politics celebrate as much as they want in the auditorium, the ordinary toiling Dalit masses are not going to achieve anything. It has not achieved so far, nor will it achieve anything in future.

The Inter-relationship of Caste and Class and 'Base-Superstructure' Metaphor: Marxist Formulation

Before discussing the thinking and role of the communist movement on the caste question in independent India and a critique of some "Dalit/Ambekarite-Marxists" and some Dalit ideological streams, it would be better that we positively put forward our stand on the interrelationship between caste and class in framework of the base-superstructure analogy.

It is the basic understanding of Marxist political economy that there are three aspects of production-relations: (i) form of ownership, (ii) people's role in production and their interrelationship (division of labour), and (iii) the form of distribution of product.

From all the three perspective caste-system has been a form of production-relations since the period of ancient India till the later medieval era (before the colonial era). In other words, despite relative internal motion and the 'Sanskirisation' of some castes, the caste system in-fact constituted the production-relations. The situation changed slightly after the coming of muslims, a model of caste-system was developed even among them. To an extent the same happened even with the Sikh religion. So, till the medieval era the caste-system formed the economic base of society and the political-religious-social superstructure used to be in relative conformity with it, that is to say that the values of caste-discrimination used to play decisive role in the social life. It can be said that the spectrum of caste-groups was more or less completely overlapping with the spectrum of class. Owing to inheritance and endogamy, the conditions of caste-groups were that of dynamic or static classes. Such a condition used to arise from conservative and rigid division of labour and in this sense it was different from any other society in the world. The condition of Muslims and Sikhs was slightly different, but among the followers of Hinduism the caste-groups themselves formed class in which the Dalit castes were landless labourers, middle castes were peasants, the 'vanik' castes were traders and the upper-castes were divided between land-owning classes and intellectual class.

For the first time there was some turbulence in the colonial socio-economic structure, particularly after the development of industries, administrative machinery and the numerous urban professions. The spectrum of the caste-groups and that of the class-groups instead of almost completely overlapping with each other got displaced to some extent. Most of the people belonging to upper-caste were land-owners even now and the petty-bourgeois class including the intellectual community developed from among them only. But different strata of the petty-bourgeois class developed even from within the Dalits and middle castes, although their proportion was very less. Most of the middle castes were Raiyat-tenants and the Dalit castes were farm labourers or belonged to the working class which used to do 'lowly' and 'unhygienic' works. On the other hand there was entry of upper caste and the middle caste tenants who were gradually being uprooted in the

industries and their numbers began to grow. Even at that time, the caste basis of division of labour and production relations was stronger in the villages. Thus, the situation of overlapping between caste and class began to be disrupted. That is to say that the caste-system was still a part of the economic base (total sum of the production-relations) but it alone did not remain part of economic base. Insofar as superstructure is concerned, mainly and essentially it remained feudal with its main base as semi-feudal land-relations. The feeble capitalist ideas and institutions which got developed, did not have the strength to affect the caste-system. Even the educated people belonging to petty-bourgeois class who were modern in some sectors of social base not only used to follow religious rites faithfully but used to believe in the tradition of endogamy and caste-based discrimination. We have discussed above that it was a conscious policy of the colonial rulers not to touch the Hindu religion and caste-system.

The all-round capitalist development in the post-colonial India brought about significant changes in the situation. Along with the broad expansion of industries a vast service sector also got developed and the capitalist transformation of the land-relations continuously speeded up the differentiation, proletarianisation and migration of rural population. The situation of inter-penetration and interweaving of caste and class remained prevalent. It is the upper castes which dominate the bureaucracy and the independent intellectual professions even now, but the Dalits and middle castes have interfered in these spheres. The landlords, kulaks and farmers mainly consist of upper caste and middle caste people but there are lower-medium and small peasants and workers belonging to the middle castes. A large population of the middle castes consists of small farmers only. Ninety percent of Dalit population consists of the proletariat and semi-proletariat, but the majority of the proletarian and semi-proletarian population are not Dalits. The so called 'impure' works are still performed by Dalits only. The handicrafts sector has shrunk a lot, but even now the "Kamin" muslim castes and the Dalit and extremely backward artisan castes work in this sector and there is negligible presence of other castes in it. How to formulate such a situation? Even now a portion of the 'total sum of production relations' (economic base) is the caste-

based division of labour and the caste-based ownership. In other words, the caste-system is still a part of the base, albeit smaller. It is true that even now the caste-system has presence, in fact strong presence at the superstructural plane. Even now, owing to the barbaric slavery of women and the religious values and beliefs which are nurtured by the capitalist mode of production, the inter-caste marriages are rare and the main trend is intra-caste marriage only. Marriage in different castes having the same economic status is difficult. The tyrannical regime of 'Khap-Panchayats' and 'caste-Panchayats' and 'Honor Killing' are the realities which render even the civil rights provided in the bourgeois constitution as worthless. Hence, the caste-system, even though it forms a small part of the economic base, is intact in rigid and strong form as a form of social structure on the superstructural plane. It is preserved not only by its old inertia but the capitalist system has given it a new vigour. Although untouchability and forms of day-to-day repression are left in lesser extent, the social segregation and humiliation of Dalits continues unabated and the brutal incidents of atrocities over them keep on happening. In the villages, often the upper-caste landowners and more than them the Kulaks belonging to middle castes commit atrocities on the Dalit labourers and then they strengthen their position by doing caste-based mobilisation. The workers belonging to other castes do not take the side of the Dalit workers. Thus the clash of economic interests is coloured with casteism. The essence remains that of class-struggle and it gets expressed in a distorted manner as caste-struggle. The upper-caste and middle-caste land-owners being the junior partner of the ruling establishment, any legal action against them is taken either for the namesake or out of compulsion of the bourgeois politics. As far as the tyrannical Khap Panchayats are concerned, they do not have independent political power (as some neo-Marxists such as the theoreticians of the New Socialist Initiative think), they are the strong social-props of the bourgeois nation-state and are umbilically attached to the bourgeois politics. As we have discussed above, the entire game of vote-bank in the bourgeois parliamentary politics is played on the caste-based and communal polarisation, then on its turn this game enhances the mutual hostility and segregation of the castes and strengthens the social structure of the caste whose

victims are obviously mostly the Dalit castes. While the caste-system distorts and disfigures the class-struggle in the rural areas and breaks the unity of the broad toiling masses, it becomes an obstacle in the class-unity of the toiling masses in the urban areas. Although, unlike the rural areas it is not the main obstacles in the urban areas. In none of the spontaneous or organised struggles of the unorganised workers waged in the recent times, the caste-based discrimination was found to be a problem for unity. Nevertheless, it has to be admitted that the walls of caste-based discrimination and segregation exist even among the urban proletariat which is exploited by the trade union leaders of the bourgeois parties. Secondly, the Dalit workers involved in the 'impure' works stand isolated, both in the struggles and in the social life.

Wrapping up all the details it can be formulated that caste-system even today forms part of the economic base and its presence is fiercely effective at the level of social-cultural-ideological superstructure. It is not a pre-capitalist superstructure, nor its remnant. It is a capitalist superstructure. It is a capitalist caste-system. The caste-system has been co-opted through articulation. Using the Hegelian terminology it can be said that the caste-system has been sublated, that is from a lower level phenomenon it is become a higher (complex) level phenomenon in which the substance of past development is present. Even now small sections of the spectrums of caste-groups and the classes overlap each other.

On Some Incorrect and Some Incomplete and Half-baked Formulations

An accurate formulation of the interrelationship between the caste and class in the context of production-relations and social superstructure is not found in the official documents and write-ups of the communist movement from beginning till the era of revisionism; what is found is only some general description and discussion of tasks. In his article *Caste, Class and Property-Relations* written sometime in the decade of 1970s, B.T. Randive escapes from theoretically formulating what is mentioned in the title itself. The historians such as Kosambi, R.S. Sharma and Irfan Habib have given clear and more or less accurate formulations with

regard to the caste and production-relations in ancient and medieval India, but after the development of capitalism in the post-colonial India, the attempt to understand this began after quite a while.

From the last century till today, various communist-revolutionary groups have written extensively on this question and even the neo-Marxist and post-modernist Marxist “thinkers” have been involved in a lot of discourse. There is an abundance of mechanical and anti-marxist stand in the formulation of the communist-revolutionary groups and there are lot of things which create illusions. On the other hand, the mix and match done by the neo-Marxist clique is nothing but a somersault to craft a “new Marxism”. Here it is possible only to discuss some representative trends and we will stick to that only.

First of all, let us consider a formulation by the late general secretary of CPI (ML) (Liberation) Vinod Mishra which twists the very basic Marxist understanding of base and superstructure itself. In the April 1994 edition of ‘Liberation’ while writing a critique of Thomas Mathew’s book *Caste and Class Dynamic—Radical Ambedkarite Praxis* he puts forward many correct criticisms about the concept of ‘Dalit democratic revolution’ and about Ambedkar, but at the same time he also gives some surprising propositions. In this article he writes: “So, class is the basic category. In certain historical situations it may express itself in the form of castes, in other situations the two may be interwoven, overlapping and at the same time criss-crossing each other, and in yet another situation castes are disintegrated to crystallise as classes. This is how the antithesis between two proceeds, until the caste as the regulator of mode of distribution stands annihilated.”

Here we get to know that caste is not in the division of labour or property-relations but a regulator of the mode of distribution. Now the question arises as to where should we put this “regulator”, in the economic base as a part of the mode of production or outside it. He answers this when he writes another comment in the January 1995 edition of ‘Liberation’ on the response given by Mathew on this critique. In this comment he writes, “For me, the caste system itself was the product of a certain mode of production and the corresponding level of production relations. Class relations here

assume the form of castes, which, in their turn, are given a divine sanction by priests. Their ‘permanence’, however, is determined primarily not by any divine sanction but by the static social organisation of the village community which again is the product of a definite level of productive forces. The caste and class here appear in an apparent harmony. This harmony of class and caste, this correspondence of base and superstructure is apparent because the two are distinctly separate categories rooted respectively in the base and the superstructure, in the mode of production and regulation of distribution.”

Till now we knew from the famous quotation of the preface of Marx’s work *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* that Marx used to consider the total sum of the production-relations as economic base and not the mode of production. Mode of Production refers to the unity of the forces of production and production-relations which shows the achieved level of production of the means of production and consumer goods in particular time duration. It is the dialectics between the production-relations and the forces of production which is the fundamental contradiction of class society. While there are many Marxists who create confusion by referring the mode of production as the economic base, Vinod Mishra gives an “original” proposition by referring to mode of production as base and regulation of distribution as superstructure. As per the basics of Marxist political economy the form of ownership, role of people in production and their interrelationship and the form of distribution of the product, all three are the three aspects of production-relations. Vinod Mishra has invented a new Marxist Political Economy by putting the distribution (that is its form) in the arena of superstructure, while Marxism till now has been putting the political-legal-social-cultural institutions and the definite forms of social consciousness (ideology, values etc.) in the arena of superstructure. Even Marx had said the same. The series of Vinod Mishra’s mistakes goes like this: the mode of production (production-relations + forces of production) is base (wrong); the regulation of distribution is superstructure (wrong); caste is related to merely regulation of distribution and not with the mode of production (this also is wrong). Now he conveniently reaches to the conclusion that the dialectics between class and caste is the one

between base and superstructure. Further he writes, “As the level of productive forces develops and the mode of production undergoes a slow change, the harmony is broken; class and caste, base and superstructure come into conflict, each trying to define the other.”

Here it seems to be suggested that class stands in base (and caste in superstructure). Yet another confusion! There are many who commit this mistake of describing the class as only an economic category or referring it as base itself. Class is a basic social category. The production-relations are the cause of its rise and its determination. In Lenin’s words, “*Classes are large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in the historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organisation of labour, and, consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it. Classes are groups of people one of which can appropriate the labour of another owing to the different places they occupy in a definite system of social economy.*” (Lenin, Collected Works, Vol.29, page 421). As Marx wrote in the famous preface of the above-mentioned book, “*In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will.*” After these relations are established, men get divided into classes. In itself classes are not production-relations so that we could call it as base.

One of the streams of neo-Marxists reject the analogy of base-superstructure itself as mechanical and describe it as inadequate to understand the questions such as caste and gender.

In this context, an article by the two representatives of this stream—Subhash Gatade and Umashankar (published in ‘Sandhan-1’, paper read in the Seminar of the ‘Saajha Sanskritik Abhiyan’) —titled ‘The Question of Dalit Emancipation’ is cited. When they come to the question of class and caste, initially one gets the feeling that the thinker-duo have reservations against the mechanical understanding of the economic base and superstructure and the economic understanding of the class-struggle. But later on it gets clear that they are in fact inspired by the purpose of rejecting them altogether. They tell us that everything has a phenomenal level and

an essential structural level. We cannot directly reach to the structural level through sense-perception. For this one has to go through the process of abstraction. Further, they inform us that mode of production is an essential social structure and owing to its relation on structural level class is a structural concept, not merely an economic concept. The greater the complexity of a social system, deeper is its structural level and by the time it reaches on the phenomenal level its impact gives rise to as much complex and diverse properties. The ultimate conclusion is that in the complex formation of today's capitalist mode of production the class struggle at the structural level would not manifest itself directly or separately. It will often come as entwined and diversified form of social struggles only.” In other words, the class struggle will now take place in the form of social movements focussed on caste, gender and environment etc. It is to reach to this conclusion that we are first taught the ABC of Marxist epistemology. Every Marxist knows that everything has a phenomenal level, a level of appearance and through sense-perception we reach to the level of perception. The second level is the structural level, the level of essence to which we reach through the process of abstraction, it is the stage of conception or that of conceptual knowledge. Till here it is fine. It is after this that the bungle lies. Everything in nature and in society has a structural plane and a phenomenal plane. It is not as if class struggle is a structural concept whose phenomenal level is the social movements. Class has a phenomenal level (level of perception) and a structural level (level of conception). Mode of production has a phenomenal level and a structural level. Caste has a phenomenal level and a structural level. When a common man says that we are workers and are fighting for our right, or when he says that capitalism is plunderer, or when he says we belong to this caste, or we do not believe in caste, he is at the phenomenal level, at the level of perception. When a person reaches to the level of definition and role of the working class by carrying out social analysis, when he tells about the qualities and contradictions of a particular mode of production through intense study and analysis, when he speaks after understanding the historical socio-economic basis of caste, he is speaking at the structural level or at conceptual level. It is here that a muddle has been created. If the class struggle

will now manifest itself only in form of social movements, it needs to be asked whether the myriad spontaneous and organised workers' movements which are taking place with their economic-political class demands or the owner farmers are waging movements with their class demands of costs and minimum support price, not the movements of classes?

It is in relation to this very logic that the thinker-duo passionately say, "some people think that the economic base is a kind of foundation on which the superstructural edifice is built . All this is verbal jugglery based on wrong understanding. If we dig the society, it is not as if the mode of production will begin to be seen or the concrete base cannot be made visible by penetrating the superstructure." If the first sentence in this is a verbal jugglery then this has been played by everybody from Marx to Mao. It is the truth. Whatever Marx wanted to convey through this metaphor is clear in the preface of *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Every metaphor, comparison or resemblance is incomplete and lame. Even Lenin said the same. To take an analogy literally is to extend a logic to the level of nonsense. If we take it literally a counter-argument can be made that with which spade will we dig the society? With which arrow will we penetrate the superstructure? A Marxist does not study a mode of production by penetrating the superstructure but through the mechanism of reaching from the phenomenal level to the structural level by studying and analyzing the economic facts. The study of the mode of production means the study of development of production-relations (form of ownership+division of labour+forms of distribution) and the forces of production and the study of the development of internal contradictions going on in between the two. Similarly, he/she studies the superstructure and certify their conclusions related to the base. Further they try to understand the contradiction between the base and superstructure. Here there is another bungle. The mode of production has been referred to as base and not the total sum of the production-relations. To replace the mode of production with production-relations is to conceal the contradiction between the total sum of production-relations and the forces of production which is manifested in form of social class struggle. The same mistake was committed by Vinod Mishra as well. Anyways, the main purpose of

the thinker-duo is to describe the so-called social movements themselves as the only form of class struggle.

The thinker-duo in-fact create an imaginary character of a narrow-minded communist, put some stupid things in his mouth and then while refuting them they say some right things and then take them to their desired conclusion through their “new” epistemology. Their own conclusion is clear that the class struggle will now be manifested at the phenomenal level in the form of social movements only. They level a charge on communists that while they consider the strikes and land-struggle as class struggle, when it comes to the struggles as as the anti Dalit oppression struggle or the struggle for woman emancipation they consider them to be isolated from the class struggle, still they take part in these social movements because the revolutionaries have to take part in the social movements. Even a communist having an average level of understanding does not think like this. It is a general understanding of Marxism that every social movement has a class substance. It is an indirect or distorted form of class struggle which arises out of the social contradictions of the society in question. The communist leadership through participating in the struggle tries to bring the above contradiction in the role of the subordinate aid to the main contradiction because ultimately that contradiction can be resolved alongwith the resolution of the main contradiction. **The bourgeoisie and the proletariat strive to establish their hegemony over every social movement.** Let us take examples: The movement of nations and nationalities is the movement of the people of a nation or nationality under the leadership of national bourgeoisie or petty-bourgeoisie against the ruling big bourgeoisie of a multi-nation country. Communists support it because it is against the bourgeois state. At the same, along with supporting the right of self-determination they also tell through continuous propaganda that the solution to the root problem lies in socialism, a step ahead of national independence. There is a clear-cut class character of student movement, from the viewpoint of substance it is a united front of middle class and other classes of people. Bourgeois politics tries to establish its hegemony through bourgeois student organisations and the proletarian politics tries to align the struggle of common students with the proletarian struggle by establishing its

hegemony over it. Women's movement too is a movement of the women of all the classes. Various forms of the bourgeois women's movement fight for some concessions-reforms within the system while a women's movement guided by the proletarian politics even while participating in these struggles takes it in the direction of struggle for socialism, it constantly tells that ultimately the slavery of women belonging to all classes can only end during the period of socialist transition. It gives greater stress on organising the women belonging to working class and lower-middle class because the women belonging to the upper class owing to their class interest do not accept the slogan of socialism and the radical path of struggle and they are immersed in the legal reforms and celebration of the identity itself. Even the mutual clashes among the castes are essentially the distorted and skewed forms of class struggle only. If bourgeois or petty-bourgeois leadership is dominant in the Dalit organisations, even while they have different remedies they essentially confine the wider Dalit population to some reforms within the system only. **The task of proletarian politics is to struggle within the sphere of the democratic rights against the oppression of the toiling majority Dalit population and at the same time align it to the common demands of the wider toiling population belonging to other castes, to present a comprehensive programme of caste-annihilation and to carry out continuous propaganda and organise movement for breaking the segregation and prejudices at the superstructural plane.** The thesis of the thinker-duo can be seen in a more refined form and with more open intentions in the draft manifesto of the 'New Socialist Initiative' (January, 2011). The one visible change in the manifesto is that the stand that the class struggles will now be manifested in the social movements only, has been given up. The manifesto recognises even the movements of workers and that of toiling masses as forms of class struggle, but at the same time it cleverly reaches to the stage of writing a new edition of identity politics with the ladder of Marxist logic. The manifesto tells us that a person does not have a single identity but multiple identities. "As a social unit every individual stands on many axes" and "takes multiple identities along." So among the many axes, class is one. Further, "gender, caste, race, ethnicity, nationality and religious identity are examples of the social relations

which cut through the axis of class relations in different ways and thereby create the social reality.” So these lines have their independent existence and cut through the axis of class relation. Earlier, it has been mentioned that they themselves are axes. This alternative language of discourse which stands apart from the Marxist analysis is quite confusing. But its intention is obvious and that is to make all the contradictions as equivalent and to disintegrate the social struggles into the struggles of identities instead of organising the class struggle of masses around the main social contradiction. Marxism tells us that amongst these myriad so-called identities many are burden of past which have been kept intact consciously in order to stop class-polarisation. Some remnants are at the superstructural plane and some have their roots in the base of new production-relations as well. Some are imagined identities which are either the remnants of past or constructed. Some are the contradictions which have been intact during the entire duration of class society, e.g. the question of gender. Earlier, the subservience of women had feudal character, now it is capitalistic. Some contradictions essentially come under the multi-level and multi-form contradictions of the capitalist society. Capitalism has adopted several pre-capitalist structures by reinvigorating them, it apparently gives the impression of an ostensible continuity of some contradictions from the past, but their class structural essence has changed. Since productive activity is the basic human activity, therefore, the production relations alone could be the base of society and the classes formed out of them could alone be the basic categories and in the root of other social categories lie this class essence in one way or the other. Hence, it is obvious that amongst all identities of human beings, class identity alone is the overriding identity. It is only on this basis that a broad mass mobilisation can be carried out. To strengthen the class identity is not to leave other identities but it is to align the masses struggling on the judicious questions of nationality, gender, caste etc. with the main struggle. Class identity alone is the universal identity which overlaps all other identities. Capitalism uses the struggles of all identities as safety valve, smoke-screen and an instrument of diminishing the class polarisation by articulating it as per its convenience. The vanguard of proletariat understands their

class essence and subordinates them to the wider revolutionary struggle, it makes them as its constituting element. Today there is a whole stream of neo-Marxist thinking which is using the phraseology of post-modernist discourse (it also includes identity politics) in order to escape from or go away from the basic propositions on the questions of class analysis, class struggle, party, state and revolution. Subhash Gatade-brand thinkers of this stream celebrate the new rise of self-identity in the several small organisations and movements of Dalits, but they do not see as to how these myriad organisations become the abhorrent opportunist players of the parliamentary politics in a short course of time. They do not see that one of the culminations of the rising of the identities is coming to fore in the form of mutual clashes between the Dalit castes-subcastes (e.g. Mala-Madiga struggle in Andhra Pradesh) and segregation. They do not tell us as how any project of Dalit emancipation and caste-annihilation will be developed through these risings of Dalit identity. They remain devoted towards Ambedkar for bringing out realisation of Dalit identity and for bringing awareness against the social oppression of Dalits and they are never tired of blaming and accusing the communists for ignoring the caste-question and keeping a distance from Ambedkar, but they have never analyzed the political outlook, political role, his project of Dalit emancipation and his outlook of economics and history. They do not tell us how factual and logical were Ambedkar's thoughts on Marxism, the "pig's philosophy", on the dictatorship of proletariat, on religion and on the superiority of Buddhist religion over Marxism. Such people believe that it is important to worship Ambedkar for taking the Dalits along and condemning the communists has become a sort of ritual to them. An oppressed community does not come along if one carry the constructed idol of their old hero, one has to give it a concrete programme and a clear project of emancipation. It might take long time in this task if the subjective forces of revolution are weak due to other objective and subjective reasons. But there is no other alternative. This thinking is thoroughly incorrect that the main reason for the failure of the communist movement has been its lack of understanding and avoidance of the caste-system. The main reason for the failure of the communist movement is its inability to intensively study-analyze

the base and superstructure of Indian society owing to its ideological weakness and its inability to develop a thorough programme—strategy and general tactics. Its inability in not determining the concrete task by correctly analyzing the caste question is a part of this main weakness or a by-product.

Among the communist groups in India, many have tried to give an interpretation of the caste-question but they are often superficial, incomplete or wrong. Somebody says that the production-relations in the past were based on caste-system (then the caste-system was based on what?). Somebody says that the caste-system was based on the division of labour (was it based on or the caste was itself a rigid structure of the division of labour, or whether it was only division of labour or the caste used to determine the form of ownership and the *modus-operandi* of distribution as well?). Somebody says that the caste was linked with the production-relations (was it only linked or was it part of it and to which category it belonged—base or superstructure or both?). Also, there are those who consider caste as a superstructure only in all the era whose base was production-relations (and it is even now). Even while giving the history of the origin and development of the caste-system several wrong propositions (not accepted by the established Marxist historians) have been given, but it is not possible to discuss them here. In the colonial era, despite the presence of feudalism, the entry of industrial capital both maintained and attacked on its root, the overlapping between the spectrum of the caste-groups and that of class-groups was breached to some extent and in the post-colonial period it was shrunk to a great extent. There is a lack of clarity on this process in the writings of the communist revolutionary groups.

Some M-L groups owing to their inability to correctly formulate the caste-question believe it to be a pre-capitalist superstructure (social formation) based upon the semi-feudal land-relations while others view its presence even in the fabric of base of land-relations. The problem is that all such groups ignore the statistics about the nature of land-rent, the dominant tendency of the farmers to produce for markets after getting the ownership, presence of a national market linked to the international market, polarisation of the peasant population, the tendency of differentiation and

proletarianisation, increasing encroachment of capital in agriculture and the expansion of industrial-finance capital and simply count the land-tenancy system, usury and the feudal remnants and give up the basic parameters of Marxist political economy and for the last 42 years they are adamant on accomplishing revolution in India on the model of New Democratic Revolution of China and even after a time span of 50 years they are still sticking to the 1963 document on the general orientation of the world proletarian revolution. The prometheus of Indian revolution is still tied to the rock of new democratic revolution with the chains of dogma. Among such groups some believe that the Dalit question/caste question in essence is a land question. So a radical democratic land programme can solve this. Now what needs to be understood is that even if the stage of revolution is that of democratic revolution, (as clarified by Lenin) it cannot be the aim of communists to make the landless rural workers as the small scale commodity producers by distributing land at the family level as a general land policy. The programme of democratic revolution first of all gives the ownership rights to the peasants, ends the strata of rent dependent landlords, motivates the peasants for co-operative and then collective farming, makes the state farms (which set an example) on the excess land the big estates, it makes a collective farm for the landless rural workers on the self-cultivated land of feudal landlords which have been taken over (in some special circumstances if the land is to be distributed in more backwards countries, co-operative are organised) and the sale-purchase of labour power is prohibited in agriculture. Even those middle owner farmers who are not ready to leave private farming immediately cannot hire labourers for cultivating their farms. Let us see the situation in India. The farmers have turned into owners and the big farmers have made a large section of small farmers as proletariat. The feudal rent and the rent dependent landlord have become thing of the past. The practical reality of today is that even if through a miraculous way all the landless people are handed over all the uncultivated land and the land obtained after strictly implementing ceiling (which the bourgeois land owner class, a junior partner of the state, will never allow to happen), every landless family would get 1.5 to 2 bigha land and very soon the magnet of capital will take it to the big land owners.

(if all the land is equally distributed among all the families then every family would get 3.68 hectare of land, but how will this castle in the air be built and if it has to be done by the proletariat state, why would it do it the first place?) Secondly, in today's agriculture more than area it is the invested capital which matters. After becoming small owning peasant, the condition of landless workers would be worse than that of the factory workers, due to lack of capital. This we can see even today. Therefore, even today when the immediate demands are raised for distributing the land to the rural labourers on lease, they are as much reactionary as are the demands related to the costs and support price raised by the owner farmers. The communist revolutionary groups which think in the framework of democratic revolution see the caste-system either in form of land question or of feudal superstructure. They fail to see the changed capitalist form of the caste-system.

There is yet another very strange stream which earlier used to believe in the stage of socialist revolution but has now gone back on it. It believes that the big feudalism of the kings and princes has got over (its remnants are left now) but small feudalism survives today in every village in the form of landowners and sharecroppers (this stream does not tell us that how is it that we can consider these landowners and sharecroppers as feudal?). The problem of caste is related to this small feudalism inextricably. The bigger plot of land lies with the 'upper' caste landowners (this is wrong, the bigger plot of land and capital intensive agriculture rests with middle castes today). The small feudalism, the existence of temples-mosques-waqfs-churches-gurudwaras, remnants of the big feudalism and caste-problem, all these combine together to make feudalism as the main contradiction. So the political economy went for a toss, the contradiction is determined by simple arithmetic aggregation only. This stream suggests the solution to the caste-problem that the socialist state would nationalise the whole land (for this even the lower middle class peasant population would not come along) and would distribute the land to people at the lowest pedestal and go towards the upper echelons of poor population (why will it not distribute equally?), then it would complete democratic revolution by completing the journey from co-operative farming to commune (so the state will be socialist but it will do democratic revolution!),

in the same process there would be perpetual struggle at the superstructural plane and thus the caste-system would be destroyed from its roots. What to comment on such superficial, utopian, farcical Marxist dreams? But when a movement disintegrates, one has to be ready to read and listen to the extremely foolish original propositions.

There is yet another group which believes in the stage of socialist revolution in India. Even though, to a large extent it correctly discusses the cracks in the old caste-system along with the capitalist development and the increasing caste-division in the castes and it underlines the effective presence of caste-system even today, yet it does not clarify as to whether there is any dynamics of renewal and reinvigoration behind this effective presence or is it merely because capitalism has developed in our country through a slow, distorted, non-revolutionary path. If the caste-system has not been renewed as a bourgeois system, it would follow logically that if capitalism stays for quite a long period, caste-system would gradually vanish. Secondly, this group does not concretely situate the caste-system in the base and superstructure. The truth is that one of the independent motions of capital is loosening the caste-system while its opposing motion is renewing, refining and adapting it at both base and superstructural levels and thereby it is articulating it within the capitalist socio-economic structure. We have clarified our stand on this question above. This stream broadly takes correct stand by criticising Ambedkar, Periyar, the phenomenon of Dalit upsurge, the tendency of harmonisation of Ambedkarism with Marxism, and the neo-Marxist identity politics, but while suggesting the path of elimination of caste it gives more stress on opposing the making of caste-based organisations, exposing the Dalit leaders of bourgeois parties, exposing the NGO-brand identity politics and the neo-Marxist outlooks. Positively it finds it proper to oppose the caste-based oppression and atrocities as a part of the struggle for socialism and the formation of special forum (not on the basis of caste) for cultural propaganda against the caste-system and stresses on encouraging the inter-caste marriage. So the main stress is that if there is proper class mobilisation, the problem of caste will not remain a major hurdle. This organization is silent on the question as to whether the slogans

of propaganda and agitation in the process of the preparation of socialist revolution will directly target the caste? How will we tell the Dalit masses about the material basis and conscious activities of cast elimination in a socialist system in order to isolate the opportunist Dalit leadership and are there any immediate demands (within the sphere of democratic demands) which could be helpful in reducing the miseries of Dalits and which would strengthen the class unity of all the workers belonging to all castes?

Nowadays one can see a very strong urge among many, in fact most, of the M-L organisations for harmonising Marxism and Ambedkarism or at least borrowing something from Ambedkar in varying degrees. This was done a long ago by Sharad Patil's Satyashodhak Communist Party by adopting the ideology of Phule-Periyar-Ambedkar-Marx. Firstly, this party perhaps was not clear about the meaning of ideology itself. There is a difference among the philosophies of Phule, Periyar and Ambedkar themselves and on the philosophical essence there is no match with Marxism. Let us take the question of Ambedkar only. We have already discussed in detail his world-outlook, historical-outlook, politics, economics, solution for Dalit emancipation. None of the communist revolutionary groups clarifies as to what is to be taken from Ambedkar? One common thread is that often all these groups support reservation which was a contribution of Ambedkar. They do not pay attention to the fact that today more than being a bourgeois democratic right it has become an instrument of creating an illusion for bourgeois democracy. Secondly, some groups say the Ambedkarite thinking of carrying out movements on social (caste-based) issues should be merged with the stream of communists. Firstly, be it the question of caste, of gender or of environment, the theoretical framework of Marxism consider all these social movements as integral part of class struggle and stresses on carrying it forward. It is a different thing that the Indian communists in the past did not give enough emphasis (not that they did not do anything) on this. But on the theoretical plane Marxism's own understanding is quite rich. Secondly, Ambedkar carried out very few social movements, more than this he talked of legal remedies withing the constitutional framework by bargaining with the colonial power by organising the Dalits. Besides this he stressed on industrialisation (that

capitalist class is doing any way) and suggested the path religious conversion (which proved to be a flop).

Most such M-L groups, Gail Omvedt, Anand Teltumbde, Subhash Gatade etc. are overawed by the innovative theoretical contribution of Ambedkar that caste-system is not just a division of labour but it is the division of labourers as well and this is the speciality of India. Ignorance compels us to get surprised by treating even the common things as something original. The logical culmination of the division of labour anywhere in the world comes to the fore as the hierarchical division of labourers only. Let us first take normal examples. Those doing mental labour stand above those doing manual labour, skilled labourers stand above the unskilled labourers, permanent workers stand above the casual workers, those doing light work stand above those doing heavy work. In England, British workers used to stand above the Irish workers. In America the white workers stand above the black workers, Mulatto and Chicano workers and the immigrant workers. It is bound to happen in a capitalist society. In India the only thing which gets added to the division of labourers is that 'impure' work, heavy work and low paying lowly works are mostly done by the Dalit castes and even at the workplace they have to face greater social segregation as compared to any black or Mexican worker. Hence it is not an innovative discovery of Ambedkar, rather it is a general characteristic of capitalist division of labour.

Gail Omvedt of Shramik Mukti Dal has her original logic. She considers Indian communists as incorrigible mechanical materialists. She says that they consider caste as being absorbed in caste and while giving pure interpretation of exploitation they do not see it in the context of caste. While giving a new interpretation to the famous preface of Marx's book *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* she says that the forming of relations of social production which Marx talks about are non-class production-relations as well besides class production-relations (that is the caste production-relations). Marx's dictum that 'the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle' does not apply on India.

This formulation is faulty all through. Firstly, in the ancient and medieval India the division of labour was on the caste basis only, in

other words it was the division of labour which gave rise to caste and caste was equivalent to class. This situation was changed in the colonial era. In the capitalist era it was changed even more rapidly. The class structure which arose by the capitalist division of labour had strong elements of old caste structure, but both were no longer synonymous to each other. Caste has not been absorbed in class but there is a caste-division among the classes and there is a class division among the castes, but the majority among the Dalit castes are at the lowest pedestal in both the divisions. Even though the people belonging to other castes stand beside them as workers, but they are segregated from them and even with regard to the nature of work they have to do the 'inferior' work. Insofar as exploitation is concerned, exploitation is an act of extracting surplus in the process of social production, it happens at the class plane only. Here it is not a question of less or more. It might be possible that a worker producing more on an advance machine gets more salary, but surplus might be extracted to greater extent. "Exploitation" is a well defined economic category, it should not be mixed with any form of oppression or repression. A Dalit labourer gets oppressed in the factory, but his exploitation takes place as a class only.

Shramik Mukti Dal has another formulation that today a hierarchy of bourgeois caste-system has developed in which Dalits and tribals are engaged in unskilled, burdensome and 'impure' works, middle castes are engaged in 'blue collar' industrial jobs and unprofitable burdensome agricultural works and the 'upper' caste people are engaged in white collar upper jobs and managerial professions. Reservation and capitalist development has not brought about any significant impact over this caste-based division of labour. In this structure the surplus gets extracted from the bottom and reaches to the top with the bourgeois class. In this entire scheme the objective reality is not accurately reflected. If we leave aside the 'impure' works, then among the unorganised sector workers who do unskilled and burdensome works the population of non-Dalits and non-tribals is much more than the Dalit and tribal population. Secondly, the population engaged in agriculture has not been seen as differentiated. The section belonging to middle caste and upper caste kulaks-landowners-farmers is barbaric exploiter, it gets the work done by hiring the labour power, if at all it is facing

any crisis it is that of the capitalist agriculture. Then there is a population of small and medium farmers which is moving towards destruction and which consists of middle castes, some upper castes, and a few Dalit castes and tribals. It is true that in the higher jobs even now the upper castes are dominant. Insofar as extraction of surplus is concerned, as we have already told, it is not determined by the difficulty of social life but from the productivity of the particular sector.

The party's programme based on this scheme is thoroughly social democratic in nature. It has no trace of the programme of revolution and socialism. This party talks about ending the material basis of the bourgeois caste-system by adding the redistribution of land and water to the landless labourers in the land programme of the redistribution of land-ownership and means of production and moving towards co-operative socialist farming. It demands for providing seeds, agricultural instruments at cheaper cost to particularly the lower caste people, giving special training to the artisan castes for improving their traditional skills, giving loans and stimulus package to them for developing them in the co-operative agro-industry sector and giving training of organic farming to the Dalits and tribals. Besides, it demands to continue the reservation and to promote the inter-caste marriages. It can be part of any revisionist party, "social movement", NGO or bourgeois party. Gail Omvedt's entire new dialectical historical materialism for Indian condition gets exposed in its bourgeois reformist form when it reaches the stage of implementation.

Another main proponent of harmonisation between Marxism and Ambedkarism, Anand Teltumbde, while on the one hand believes that all the projects of Ambedkar for caste-annihilation ended in failure, yet it is not sure why he considers Ambedkar's book 'Annihilation of Caste' (which we have discussed above) to be as important in India as is 'The Communist Manifesto'. Teltumbde believes reservation to be a whirlwind in this age of increasingly reduced job opportunities and considers it to be worthless. He is also a staunch opponent of the identity politics. But instead of understanding caste in the framework of base and superstructure, he considers this framework itself to be a hurdle in understanding the relationships between caste and class and believes the inability

of the Indian communists to align the caste with the class struggle to be their unpardonable mistake. We have given above our stand on the question of base-superstructure. We do not get any direction of annihilation of caste even from Teltumbde, nor do we get to know as to what will Marxism get from Ambedkar after aligning the caste with the class struggle.

Insofar as the so called Dalit theoreticians are concerned, their arguments are so crude and weak that it is not at all possible to have debate and discussion on them. In all it is only those doing identity politics who remain engaged in the NGO-funded fragmented social movements of various identities including caste and in the research in research institutions and they celebrate the resurgence of Dalit identity. A brief discussion of this breed has been done above. Their ideological source can be found in the post-modernist ideological streams.

Yet another thinker is Kancha Illaiya who without going into the analysis of policies count three categories of caste—Brahmanic communist nationalism, Hindu nationalism (Tilak, Gokhale, Golwarkar, SP Mukherji etc all together) and Dalit bahujan nationalism (Phule, Periyar and Amedkar etc.). One of the forms of implementation of this thesis of Dalit bahujan nationalism was the politics of Kanshiram and Mayawati. The alliance with the party of shudra caste (SP) was corroborating this thesis. But this alliance had to break. Then Mayawati started taking about Sarvajan in order to take Brahmins along. Now Kancha Illaiya's thesis has changed and according to the new thesis the Dalits should expand their hold in all the parties so that their claim to power is strengthened.

Chandrabhan Prasad is yet another theoretician who describes promoting Dalit capitalism as the path of Dalit emancipation, he still believes colonialism to be the emancipator of Dalits and installs the idol of Angrezi devi. He does not tell us whether the few Dalit capitalists who will emerge will squeeze the Dalit workers in their factories or not and whether they will distribute the plundered profit among the Dalits and improve their condition? He and some other Dalit thinkers propose to promote the Dalits in the private firms through the steps such as Kennedy's 'Affirmative Action'. Firstly, it is like building castle in the air. Secondly, these people do not know that despite the elapse of one century from Lincoln's abolition of

slavery to Kennedy's 'Affirmative Action' and even after several anti-racist movement, despite having a black president, black military chief, black secretary of state and several black players and artists, even now the majority black workers do the most burdensome and low-paid jobs, they live in hellish ghettos, their percentage among the unemployed is highest in proportion of their population, 70 percent people in the American prisons are blacks and other immigrants and several other fine manifestations of racial discrimination are still present.

Most of other Dalit thinkers do blind worship of Ambedkar and avoid any radical activity outside the sphere of parliament and reform. They do not have any project for Dalit-emancipation. If you talk of logic and science with them and in case you are not Dalit (even if you have abandoned your caste) they will put the stamp of caste-chauvinist on you.

In reality these vocal people of the Dalit intellectual community mostly represent the class interests of petty-bourgeois class. They are not bothered about the condition of the majority Dalit population and any struggle for their emancipation. They have gone far beyond them. There is a tendency in them of becoming a leader of the majority of Dalit population on account of their social status and caste base. Yet, even while they live in a well-to-do environment they have to face subtle humiliation, avoidance and segregation from the upper caste colleagues and because of this a passion gets generated among them which is reflected in their personality and their writings. Their real role today is that of social prop of the capitalist system. This dictum of Marx is to a large extent applicable to them, "The more a ruling class is able to assimilate the foremost minds of a ruled class, the more stable and dangerous becomes its rule." (Capital, vol. 3, page 601)

Communist Movement in Independent India: A Retrospection

We have discussed above till the going astray of the Communist Party of India towards revisionism after the defeat of Telengana struggle. Later on, another revisionist party CPM got separated from it in 1964 after split. Then in the decade of 1980s the CPI (ML) (Liberation) also joined this fold.

Due to their presence in the parliamentary politics and owing to being dominant in the trade union politics, since last sixty year it is the face and conduct of these parties which has been there before the people in the name of communists. In the organs and documents of these parties the discussions on the caste question have been taking place, but in practice they have not done anything except for releasing some statements against few incidents of the Dalit oppression and some ritualistic protest demonstration. When a party makes the parliamentary politics and the trade union activities as its only task, it loses the courage to to militantly carry out propaganda and agitation even on social issues.

They fear in building a social movement by firmly raising the caste question or even carrying out communist propaganda that the non-dalit castes might be displeased with them whose demands they raise in the villages with prominence. At the same time in order to appease the agricultural labourers (mostly Dalits) they also continue to verbally raise their demands and the issues of caste oppression, although their mass base amongst them has slipped away and the parties such as BSP has taken over it.

Their main base in the cities is amongst the white collar (Bank, insurance etc.) workers and organised blue collar workers on whose economic demands their ritualistic activities carry on. Amongst these workers there are very few belonging to Dalit castes. Despite the grievances, the poor masses still go along with them either in the hope of some economic concessions or security or it is because they have been finding the red flag as theirs for generations. The most abominable thing about the caste question is the lifestyle of the leaders and activists of these parties. Mostly all of them do intra-caste marriage with religious rites and rituals (by giving the logic of being isolated from society), perform religious rites of life-death, even do nepotism behind the scene and while finalising the candidates for election they also consider the caste-equation of the areas. Their leaders are the people belonging to elite strata of society who do tricks to settle their sons and daughters in the best possible manner. All the principles and customs of the party life which were alive till 1950 have been gradually washed away. These revisionists are the second line of defence of this system itself. Their lifestyle corresponds to their politics, but since it is the

face of these people which is there before the common people in the form of communist, it is correct that the reputation of communism has fallen among the Dalit castes, the base among them has been destroyed and a fertile ground has been prepared for adopting the anti-communist propaganda carried out by the new breed of the Dalit leaders and thinkers.

The communist revolutionary movement which arose from the Naxalbari peasant uprising of 1967 heralded new hopes. This wave was expanded to every part of the country. It had tremendous impact on the rural poor (in which Dalits were in majority). The exploiters were publically sentenced. The land of the landowners were taken away. However by the time of formation of CPI(ML) in 1970 the “left-wing” adventurism had come to dominate the movement. It throttled the situation akin to a mass uprising of the rural poor. The movement got scattered and kept on disintegrating. Its root cause was the ideological weakness and the wrong understanding of the nature of Indian society and the programme (stage) of revolution. Instead of looking and understanding the new realities the attempts to fit them in the framework of the democratic revolution were continued and the main trend remained that of split and disintegration. The stagnation of a long time also encouraged deviations. The trends and tendencies of right-wing also arose in response to the ultra-left. Even the few organisations which adopted revolutionary mass line by opposing the “left-wing” adventurism right since 1970 suffered from stagnation and fragmentation owing to wrong understanding of the nature of Indian society and programme. A stream of the M-L camp opened the new avenue by developing the correct understanding of the capitalist development of Indian society and the stage of socialist revolution, but even this stream suffered from fragmentation due to its incomplete understanding, petty-bourgeois departures and lack of Leninist organisational principles and modus-operandi and the struggle to overcome these shortcomings goes on till this day. Even today some communist revolutionary groups are applying mass line with right-wing trend, a powerful stream is that of “left-wing” adventurism and some are taking on the challenge of building a party on the line of socialist revolution and to move forward the social experiments.

Despite this difficult and awful condition, when the question of the impact of the communist revolutionary movement on Indian society in the context of caste question will arise, its positive aspects must be highlighted. In Andhra, Bihar, Bengal, Chattisgarh and in some other states (we will discuss about Punjab separately), the organisations which applied mass line and those which applied “left-wing” line, both had their base in the rural areas amongst the landless poor and even within them mainly amongst Dalits. The land of land lords were captured and distributed among the poor, it might be wrong from the perspective of line, but it had a positive impact in bringing about a new consciousness among the Dalits and in forging their unity with other poor. Not only were the oppressor landlords punished, the organised barbaric genocides by their goonda armies were avenged.

Despite having a line of “left-wing” terrorism, a stream of communist revolutionaries for the first time taught the tribals of the forested regions of Chattisgarh, Orissa, Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Andhra and one region of Bengal to stage an organised resistance. All this resulted into a situation that despite the stagnation and disintegration of the movement wherever the movement had influence or where it has an influence even now, the condition of Dalits is better than other parts of the country. There the reign of terror and dominance of the upper caste and middle caste on Dalits has been reduced to a significant extent. Dalits move with greater self-respect in these areas. Despite its myriad theoretical weaknesses, overall the role played by the communist movement (do not include the revisionist parties in this) in lessening the social oppression of Dalits is not matched by any Dalit movement or the reform movement. The elite Dalit intellectuals who are tired of cursing all the communists are far removed from the Dakkhin tolas (Dalit settlements) and the shanty towns where despite having been scattered and disintegrated communist revolutionary activists are working whatever be their numbers. Punjab’s situation has been somewhat different. In the era of semi-feudal land relations here the communists had their main base among the Jat farmers and less in the rural landless people and workers. The land relations got changed and a large section of the Jat farmers turned rich and became upper-middle farmers. The

communist revolutionaries had got this mass base as a legacy, even the activists mainly used to come from such families only. The new base among the workers and rural landless people was made only to a limited extent.

Dalit population mostly (not wholly) kept a distance from this stream. Now those believing in democratic revolution taking away of land and redistribution was not possible any way. The mass base and the composition of cadre-leader could create problem in this. Consequently, instead of mustering courage to develop mass base among the Dalit workers of villages and cities and the lakhs of immigrant workers, a large section of the communist revolutionaries here took the banner of anti-proletariat demands of agricultural cost-minimum support price setting aside the Marxist political economy and they essentially remained militant peasant organisations. Their work among the workers of cities and villages always remained shrunk. Consequently, the Dalit population which is mostly worker and lower middle class remained away from it. But if we talk in the context of whole India the main base of the communist revolutionary movement was among the poor and within it among the Dalits, it fought militant battles on the question of Dalit oppression and wherever it had influence the social condition of the Dalits could be seen even today. We are saying this just to respond to the the accusations of the arm-chair intellectuals and anti-communism slandering by the leaders of bourgeois Dalit politics.

The problem has not been on this plane. The main problem has been to solve the puzzle as to how should we understand the caste question from the perspective of Marxist class-analysis, what are forms of social movement on caste question besides organising the class-based economic and political struggles, how much importance they should be given, what will be our slogans of propaganda and agitation, how to build the workers' unity by breaking the caste-based segregation, how should we inform people about today's task on this question, what is our project for elimination of caste and how should we convince the Dalits, tribals, poor muslim community ("kamin" castes) through propaganda, agitation and through examples that socialism will end the caste-system from each thread of the social fabric after going through a

process and through these many changes. Therefore, the process of today's immediate activities should be directed towards that goal.

In this context we have presented a general and brief critique of the stand point of the different communist revolutionary groups. Therefore, we have now reached a situation wherein we present before you our understanding about the project of elimination of caste and the immediate tasks thereof.

We believe Indian society to be mainly and essentially a backwards capitalist country. This capitalism is different from the Europe of 19th-20th century and Russia of 1917. Hence, due to this reason and due to changes which have occurred in the structure and modus-operandi of global capitalism, in the light of sum-up of the proletarian revolutions of the last century, the anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist revolution in this post-colonial society will be different from the October revolution in terms of form and path. At the same time, even the process of socialist transition, based on the sum-up for the past experiences, will be slightly different. It is because of this reason that we are terming it as **New Socialist Revolution**. Here we will discuss only those aspects of the programme of the revolution which are linked with the question of elimination of caste. For convenience, we will first discuss as to which path the socialism take and move forwards for the elimination of caste. After this, we will discuss the immediate tasks of the party of proletarian class in this context.

The Socialist Project of Elimination of Caste

The proletarian state will nationalise (without paying any compensation) all kinds of bourgeois government farms, huge agricultural land of old jagirs, the landed properties of the urban industrialists-traders-bureaucrats, farms of big farmers and plantation-farms, people will work in them like state industries and the responsibility of management will be borne by the committees elected by all those who work, in the leadership of the party. The landed property of kulaks-landlords-farmers will be taken over without paying any compensation and they will be converted into collective farms. In the state and collective farms, all the landless people will work and take part in the task of collective management with equal status. The small owner farmers who would not be

ready to combine their farms into the collective farms will be motivated and encouraged for co-operativisation. At some places those who would not be ready even for co-operative farming will not be allowed to hire labour power for their private farming. The sell-purchase of labour-power will be prohibited. Those carrying out private farming will not be eligible for the concessions and facilities received by collective farms like seeds, water, electricity, fertiliser etc. Gradually, owing to the assurance for economic security, the prosperity of the workers of state and collective farms and increasing faith towards socialism, even those involved in private and co-operative farming would be inspired for collectivisation. The last stage of this process would be nationalisation of the entire agriculture. Thus **by ending the private ownership of land and millennia-old landlessness of Dalits, socialism will destroy an important rural prop of the caste-system.**

Immediately after destroying the bourgeois state the proletarian state will seize all the small and big, national and foreign industries and will nationalise them whose management will be carried out by the elected committees of workers and technicians in the leadership of the party. **In the factories with the help of multi-skill training the division of labour would be flexible and mobile in which everyone will have to do all type of work (except for the works requiring technical expertise) and thus the difference between “higher” and “lower” work and between “clean” and “unclean” work would be gradually erased.** Mechanisation and the planned government arrangement for the drainage-sewage treatment plants will transform the categories of “impure” works. Then the increasing socialist consciousness will also end this culture of discrimination among people which would lessen the need for force while dividing the work in the flexible division of labour. If force is still needed on some people, it is justified.

The share market will immediately be closed. Owing to the nationalisation of the trading sector the people’s control will be established on exchange. It will lead to the end of hoarding-profitsteering-brokering and also the **breakdown of the rigid system of family profession** will have an impact on the caste-system. **Private usury will be banned and punishable with stringent sentence.** In case of any tragedy the needy will get aid from the

management committee of state, collective enterprises.

The educational institutions are important centres of caste-based discrimination apart from economic discrimination. One of the tasks to be carried out immediately by the socialist state is that all private educational institutions will be nationalised, coaching institutes prohibited and free and uniform education is declared as one of the most important responsibilities of socialist state. In the scientific education system, students are assigned the different branches of education based on aptitude and natural skills, many skills are engendered among them, the flexible division of labour enables them to do multiple works by changing profession and due to the gradual uniformity of salary, uniformity of life-style and the reducing the difference between the mental labour and manual labour, the custom of linking profession with the social prestige is ended. The socialist education apart from giving the highest importance to the culture of labour lays great stress on the cultural upgradation of all the youth. When along with reducing the inequality at the economic level the differences at the educational and cultural level be erased, it would become even more easier to demolish the wall of caste-discrimination.

Then comes the issue of health-care. Private practice, private hospitals, private medical colleges would be strictly banned. The entire health-care service will be under the state control. Socialism does not believe in the imperialist patent acts. It will produce all the medicines within the country. The health-care will be free for all the citizens. Anyone can read the brilliant work done in this field in the Soviet Union, socialist China and even in Cuba to easily know about the socialist health policy. There will be improvement in the social status of dalits by free medical education and free and uniform health-care system as well.

The socialist housing policy will play an important role in ending the caste-discrimination. The socialist state will take the whole work of housing construction in its hand. The builder-contractors will become normal working citizens. The first task of the proletarian state will be to provide comfortable housing facility to all the homeless people and those living in the slums. It will be done by seizing old palaces, spare houses of those house-owner which have multiple houses, converting the five star hotels,

marriage halls and other places of opulence into residential complexes and by taking over a part of the big houses. At the same time residential colonies will be made on large-scale.

Initially, till the time one generation of scientists, engineers, experts having received socialist education gets ready, these professionals will have to be given some concessions not only in salary but in the housing as well in order to smoothly carry out the production system. It will not be required in later phase. After the passing of initial phase the socialist state brings all the houses under the state ownership and guarantees every citizen to provide housing with all convenience. Along with the development of the forces of production, large scale construction work will have to be carried out continuously for making the houses uniformly convenient, for redesigning the old settlements and for settling new colonies by mobilising the labour-power. The villages which are settled in haphazard manner will be converted into modern colonies equipped with all basic facilities and the spare land will be taken out for other works. With the distribution of state-owned uniformly convenient housing (based on nuclear family) the problem of apartheid of dalits (and other workers), which is an important cause of social segregation, will be solved.

Due to the nationalisation of agriculture and industry, the uniformly convenient housing (and communication-transport-entertainment facility) in the villages and cities, the differences between industry and agriculture and between cities and villages will begin to vanish. In the same process, the gap between mental labour and manual labour will also get reduced. These three inter-personal disparities act as the material basis for bourgeois privileges in a socialist society. Along with the fading away of these even the bourgeois privileges will vanish and consequently the bourgeois caste-system will also head towards extinction.

In the bourgeois society even religion has become a pillar of bourgeois caste-system adapting itself to the bourgeois society. In the socialist society while the communist party will continuously carry out anti-religion and pro-scientific rationalist propaganda, the socialist state as a matter of civil right will respect the right of every citizen to have their own faith and to worship. But there will be total prohibition of the interference of religion into the socio-political life.

There will be complete ban on performing religious rituals in the opening ceremonies, prayers in schools, doing *keertans* on loudspeakers, hampering the public life by marriage and religious processions, religious schools, wasting social wealth by conducting samagam etc. on the rented public places. Considering the religious feelings of people, the old established religious places will be kept intact but the state will take over their management from the trusts and abbots, all the land and money of abbeys-temples-waqfs-gurudwaras-churches etc will be seized by the state (A part of socialist primitive accumulation of capital will be collected from this immeasurable wealth, from acquisition of native and foreign companies and banks, the gold and black money seized from the houses of rich found after search). Forming religious organisations or doing any kind of socio-political mobilisation on the basis of religion will be a punishable offence. A person will have freedom to marry by observing religious rituals but the state will recognise the marriages only after registration. A marriage will not be recognised without the consent of women. The legal process of divorce will also be simple. Dowry will be an offence with stringent punishment. Thus, due to reduction in the interference of religion in the social life the process of elimination of caste will be expedited.

The subservience of women happens to be the basis of the bourgeois structure of family and intra-caste marriage. Besides the mandatory nature of universal and uniform free education and the guarantee of employment to everyone, the women will be freed from the hideous slavery of domestic work by constructing crèche, kindergardens and collective messes on large scale. As a result their participation in the social life will enhance. Their dependence on father (and husband) will be over and they could take the decisions of their life without any pressure. This will lead to a situation in which the trend of love-marriages and inter-caste marriages will become predominant and the wall of caste will begin to collapse.

The socialist state will declare all caste panchayats, Khap Panchayats, caste meetings and caste-organisations as illegal and any such attempt will be an offence with stringent punishment.

Besides the education system, the socialist state will use all the cultural mediums and the media to emphatically carry out anti-caste system propaganda along with the socialist values so that the new

citizens of the new society does not have any place in their mind for these hideous customs.

Thus socialism will eliminate the caste-system from the base and superstructure by bringing about continuous change in the production relations along with the development of the productive forces and at the same time by carrying out with full force perpetual cultural revolution in the sphere of superstructure as well. The journey from the socialist transition to communism will be quite long, but the elimination of caste-system will be a matter of few decades only.

Our Immediate Tasks

Till now we have discussed as to how the caste will be eliminated in the socialist era but it does not mean that we need to first fight for socialism and then the caste-system will automatically vanish. If the caste question will not be there on our agenda right in the process of struggle for socialism and if we will not have any immediate tasks, the leading class of the revolution itself will continue to be victim of caste-based discrimination and the propaganda carried out by the bourgeois casteist electoral and reformist leaders and proponents. The huge population of the Dalit masses will continue to be in their slumber and will continue to follow aimlessly this or that casteist leader. The same condition will be that of the ally classes of the proletariat. Therefore even if the ultimate elimination of the caste-system take place in the era of socialism, we will have to make conscious attempt to reduce its influence even during the preparation of class struggle and its development (then the upsurge of class struggle will have its own objective pressure as well and the class mobilisation will help to push the caste mobilisation behind).

The first task is to carry out continuous, intensive and widespread propaganda in various ways about the solution of caste-system through socialism and about the socialist programme of the elimination of caste. Owing to the weaknesses of the communist movement and due to the misdeeds of the revisionists (and to some extent due to our own lack of clarity) the toiling masses, particularly the Dalit masses do not know at all as to what is the path which the communists suggest for the elimination of caste. For this task the party of the proletariat will require hundreds or

rather thousands of sharp and effective communist propagandists, it will require pamphlets-booklets-cultural programmes, small education groups. But, as of now even the stage of building an all-India party itself looks distant. It will have to be brought closer through perpetual attempts. But even if the communists are organised even in a group or an organisation they must take up this task now itself.

There are some tasks which could be taken up even today. There are some demands which could be raised even today at the level of propaganda, agitation and movement.

The revolutionary unions under the influence of a revolutionary organisations, student-youth organisations, woman organisations, rural labour organisations and all mass-organisations should include the caste question in their programme, but not merely as a ritual, rather they must continuously carry out propaganda on this question, they must organise Jaat-Paant todak Bhoj-Bhat (food festival for breaking the caste), the demands of dalit workers should be given prominence in the charter of the workers' movement and there must be enthusiastic participation in the Dalit workers' movement (such as sanitary workers' movement) and diligent attempt must be made to bring other workers in their support. While organising the rural labourers every attempt must be made to break their mutual caste-based segregation. The cultural organisations must give special importance to the opposition to caste in their propaganda activities. The democratic rights movement need to come out of the ritualistic intellectual sphere of investigative team, signature campaign, protest letter and organise itself at wider social base which is capable of interfering through movement also apart from legal battle in the incidents of caste-oppression and Khap Panchayats etc.

The demand of universal, uniform and free education and employment for all is a long term demand, but the students and youth belonging to all the castes must be organised at once around this slogan and special emphasis needs to be made to take along the Dalit youth. In the educational institutions, caste-based discrimination needs to be made an issue. On the issue of reservation we will have to put forwards our stand amongst the students and youth with the statistics of jobs and facts and figures

of the results of last sixty years. We will have to tell them that we do not support the demand of taking away this democratic right which has been achieved in the past, we also oppose the scam going on in its implementation, but this demand today creates illusion towards bourgeois democracy, it has no special meaning today for the broad poor Dalit masses; on the contrary it is dividing and causing fight not only among the common masses but even the Dalit castes as well.

We must carry out continuous propaganda by logically and patiently responding to all the arguments made by the bourgeois Dalit politics of all hues and the bourgeois Dalit thinkers.

We should demand the ban on the publication of caste-based matrimonial in the newspapers. We must extend open support to inter-caste marriages and love-marriages; we must raise the legal demand of giving half of the family's property to women.

We must organise movements for legal bans on caste-organisations, caste meetings, khap and caste panchayats and their effective implementation.

We should demand a ban on public samagams (religious gatherings), imposing special tax on abbeys and temples for organising traditional fares, festivals and to ban the religious ceremonies in the government offices and school functions.

While we find it improper to form separate organisations of Dalit castes, but if the communist revolutionaries have enough strength they must form caste-elimination forums in which apart from Dalits the citizens belonging to other castes having democratic consciousness must be included. This forum will continuously hold anti-caste propaganda meetings, publish books and booklets, organise events and inter-caste marriage and actively oppose the incidents of Dalit atrocities.

In the end there is another important point. There are many communists who while giving the logic of being isolated from society take part in the religious ceremonies in their private-family lives (marriage, birth, death, yagyopaveet, upnayan etc.). These ceremonies are confined within the sphere of caste and are different for different castes. It is on the ground of above logic only that many communists wear religious symbols and relate themselves with the past religious heroes in their speeches. This is a social

cowardice and unprincipled populism as well. On the contrary, it gives the impression among the people that communists are hypocrites. We can tell from our long experience that by humbly keeping away from religious ceremonies, doing marriage without any rituals and the communist conduct of leaving behind will of not performing any rituals even on death there is no isolation from society, rather the reputation of communists is enhanced by this. We do not impose our ideology on anybody, but we can certainly apply it on ourselves. Even bourgeois democracy says so and also the constitution of this country. We are saying all this because the question of religious conduct is linked with the question of caste. If the conduct of the communists even in their personal life will be non-religious, the Dalits will have faith that this person does not believe in caste from heart.

The question of caste is millennia old. There is no quick panacea for this. It demands a long and tedious process. This question is linked with the destruction of capitalism. In today's time making a step in the direction of any project of the elimination of caste would be a courageous act. But every difficult task does require courage. Today the elimination of caste can appear as a dream, but if a dream has a scientific basis, it could be turned into reality. Such a dream should be sought by every true revolutionary.

(Translated from Hindi: Anand Singh)

HISTORIOGRAPHY OF CASTE: SOME CRITICAL OBSERVATIONS

Abhinav Sinha

In almost all the cases, the entire gamut of writings, research papers and various other kinds of essays on the caste-system, begin with some sentences or phrases that have been so overused as to be rendered into cliché, and since even after getting thoroughly worn out these clichés present the reality to a certain extent, as such I would also use a few similar sentences to begin with.

Caste/Varna is one of the main realities of the Indian social life. No historian, sociologist, anthropologist, or even a political economist, can afford to ignore this reality. Certainly, the influence of casteist mentality over the Indian social psyche goes deep. However while emphasising upon the caste system and casteist mentality, many a times common people and even the academicians and political activists have this tendency of declaring it to be the only and the single most important aspect of the Indian life and society. While doing so, in essence, they do not actually put the problem of caste and casteist mindset on the agenda of resolution, rather turn it into a meta-reality that cannot be transcended. In fact, what is inherent in such conclusions is an ahistorical view towards the caste system. Somehow caste-system is turned into a system that does not have any beginning or end, a system that is perpetual and eternal. Undoubtedly, this is not the motive of those giving such kind of statements. However, objectively, such utterances lead to such conclusions only. If we do not adopt a historical view on the caste-system, a sense of defeat sets in, which presents the caste-

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system as invincible. By rejecting all other struggles, “identities” and class-struggles, such an outlook makes the caste system an integral part of Indian life and people, it converts it into its organic characteristic and thereby it is made as a touchstone for defining Indian psyche. Recently, **due to existence of such primitive and totalitarian consciousness (!) some intellectuals have declared the Indian people themselves as a ‘totalitarian community’!** According to them, as the project of modernity remains unfinished, there exists an undercurrent of all sorts of totalitarian trends in the society ‘from below’ (that is among the common people), which manifest themselves in the form of casteism, Khap Panchayats, communalism, etc. Therefore, these intellectuals consider that the first priority is to complete the unfinished project of modernity in India, and until this project of modernity is carried to a decisive stage, the task of bringing in a revolutionary change in the whole socio-economic structure should more or less be suspended! They are not the only ones who think this way, there are many more intellectuals expressing such and similar views. These statements are usually governed by a pre-conceived notion; the preconceived notion that it is for capitalism to complete the tasks concerning the project of democracy and modernity and in case it does not do so, it becomes the main task of the progressive forces to complete these tasks, and so long as bourgeois democracy and modernity are not fully realised, proletarian tasks may be suspended. Whereas on one hand it is true that in every struggle of making capitalism more and more democratic, a revolutionary will take part always without fail, however, on the other hand she/he would do it precisely to make the soil more fertile for proletarian class-struggle, she/he does not put on hold the pure and concrete proletarian tasks until this process gets accomplished.

However, there are those intellectuals too, who take a diametrically opposite stand vis-à-vis the standpoint of the aforesaid intellectuals. These other intellectuals consider the caste-system or at least the caste-system as we recognise it today, a construct of the colonial state. These academics feel that all the identities including caste were there all along in the Indian society before India was colonised, and they co-existed (harmoniously). The colonial state under its hegemonic design constructed caste, using its

ethnographic state apparatus to oppress and crush the Indian masses. Armed with the logic of Western Enlightenment, they wanted to know India better, to rule it in a better way. The type of colonial understanding that emerged about India was the product of the fusion of brahminical and other hegemonic groups with the ethnographic machinery of the colonial state, and this is what gave birth to the caste system in its contemporary form. There existed the fetish, born out of the Enlightenment mindset, of enumerating and categorising things, due to which the Indian populace was also classified into “logical” categories, in which caste became the foremost category. The use of caste in the Census gave further impetus to this process.

Both the viewpoints neglect the historicity of the caste system. We will deliberate on both of these viewpoints further onward in this essay.

Our foremost aim in this essay is to humbly put forward a historical understanding of the genesis of the caste-system and the changes it has been undergoing through centuries. It is not our goal to present only a critical account of different trends of the historiography of caste, simply because that can be found in any standard textbook. Neither is our goal to demonstrate that the caste system has always been in flux, because that is also an established fact amongst serious academics. Historians of ancient and medieval India have repeatedly revealed it, that **the caste system has undergone significant changes during different historical periods;** historians of modern India have also shown how the colonial state as well as the nationalist politics has used the caste identity and in this process how they have brought changes in the hierarchical sequence of these identities and their interrelationships. Various sociologists have brought our attention towards the mobility persisting within the caste system. So if someone in our times claims that she/he has discovered the mobility existing within the caste system, is as if they have claimed to have discovered fire or wheel all over again! It has also been said that in different ages the socio-economic context or milieu is responsible for the changes occurring in the caste system, and it is through *articulation* with this alone that the changes take place in the internal structure of the caste system.

Thus, it is not our endeavor here to rediscover things that have already been discovered. **One of the objectives that we have in this essay is to analyze this articulation more specifically.** While arguing that socio-economic factors have been affecting and changing the caste-system, it should also be clarified that, what these socio-economic factors are, and what are the characteristic features of what we are, in general, terming as socio-economic milieu and context. In our opinion, it is the **dominant production relations and the dominant mode of production of any period, with which the articulation of the caste system takes place.** The second proposition, that we want to put forward in this essay, is that **in this mutual interaction, in the final analysis, the aspect of development of the production relations and productive forces, and class struggle plays the main role.** That is to say that in the mutual interaction between the caste system and the dominant mode of production prevailing in the society the material factor of the mode of production plays the predominant role. However, this in no way means that the caste system is being determined mechanically at each moment by the changes taking place in the mode of production and production relations. That is why we have clarified at the very outset that it is in the ultimate analysis that these changes play determining role. Then it does not also mean at all that caste and class are essentially one and the same, or that class is caste indeed. Definitely, any such concept is not really talking about any *articulation*, rather about the complete overlapping of two distinct phenomena, and evidence from the Indian history show that **except at the stage of its inception, there has never been any stage in the entire history of caste, when there was any kind of complete overlapping between caste and class.** But subsequently the gap which was produced between the caste system and class division has continued in the history till date, and in different systems of production a **correspondence** between the two has existed whose form has been changing according to these very different production systems. The third point that we want to make in this essay is that **the caste system, during every historical period, has been playing the role of a useful ideology for maintaining the hegemony of different ruling classes.**

In this way, one must accept the peculiarity of the caste

system, because in the history of other societies, we do not come across such an element of continuity in the ideologies according to **legitimation to the dominance and hegemony of the ruling classes.**

Generally, in other societies, with the arrival of a new ruling class, the main aspect in the new ideologies legitimising the rule of the ruling class has been the aspect of change. But in the history of Indian social formation, despite various fundamental changes in the ideology of caste, the core element that determines and represents it, has remained the same. Of course, while the variables on which this ideology has been applied in different social formations have completely changed, and the execution of this ideology itself has undergone fundamental changes.

Later, we will consider the origin of the caste system, the changes that it has undergone in the historical epochs of ancient and medieval India, as well as the changes in the production relations that were the fundamental reasons behind these changes and then we will also underline some basic changes in the caste system in modern India, especially in the latter half of the colonial period and in the post-independence India, and on that basis would try to substantiate our aforesaid propositions.

Interpretations of the Origin and Development of Varna/Caste System: Main Problems of Historiography

There is a lot of controversy among the historians regarding the development of the Varna system in its embryonic form during the last phase of the Rigvedic period (also known as the Early Vedic Period) and about its consolidation in the Later Vedic Period. There are several opinions prevalent among historians as to what were the main factors behind the emergence of varna system and also about the factors which played the main role in the emergence of caste (*jati*) later on. We will present the main views in brief, and also our opinion about them. We will also discuss later on the differences between *varna* and caste (*jati*). **But the analysis of historiography must also be done in a historical manner, because the history of historiography is also indispensable for understanding the appropriate ideas, interpretations and propositions about history.** Therefore, we will begin with the

colonial period. The discussion about the ideas which were put forward by the native and foreign observers about the varna/caste system in the earlier periods is outside the scope of this paper. Moreover, at present such an analysis is also not needed, because systematic studies on the process of social differentiation of the Indian society broadly began during the colonial period only. In what follows, we will give a brief account of the main studies of the caste system and their interpretations during the colonial period.

Main Interpretations During the Colonial Period

In a way, it were the colonial administrators and scholars who initiated a systematic study of the social structure of ancient India. The foremost among the initial representative works was “*A Brief View of Caste System of North-western Provinces and Awadh*” by **J.C. Nesfield**, which was published in 1855. Nesfield, on the basis of his studies, proposed that the determination of occupations on the basis of heredity, is the basic foundation, on which the edifice of caste system stands. According to Nesfield, it were the earlier guilds of artisans and craftsmen in ancient India that got metamorphosed into various castes. The hierarchy among them was determined by the oldness or newness of the occupation. The newer an occupation was, the higher would be its position in the hierarchy. After this, several colonial administrators and the western scholars of that era tried to define and interpret the caste system. Among them French Indologist **Charles Emilie Marie Senart** played a significant role. Senart was the first person to make a distinction between varna and caste. He considered the motion of varna to be more akin to that of class, while caste was an autonomous entity to a certain extent. Later, however, the castes got assimilated into the varnas. Whereas the hierarchy of castes was a real phenomenon for him, he considered the hierarchical organization described in the varnasharma system to be unreal and conceptual. Senart thinks that the brahmins included the various Indo-European lineages in the varnashrama system and had given them a subordinate status, so that their own hegemony remained intact. However, this opinion of Senart was rejected by most of the historians. But the greatest contribution of Senart was that, he made a distinction between the varna and the caste system, which was to

a large extent adopted in the later day historiography.

Herbert H. Risley, the colonial administrator who started carrying out the Census in India, gave his own idea on the caste/varna system. According to him, the predominant factor in the evolution of the castes, was the racial factor. He used the nasal index (the length of nose) in order to distinguish between the Aryans and non-Aryans. The caste system got considerably consolidated after Risley started a caste-based Census, besides, it got ossified as well in its contemporary form. The influence of Risley's racial interpretation continued till much later period, however, in the historiography of the post-independence India, the archaeological and literacy evidences have rejected this racial interpretation decisively.

After Risley the western scholar who left a marked influence on the studies of the caste-system, was the French sociologist **Celestin Bouglé** who also collaborated with **Emile Durkheim**. The interpretation of the caste system which Bouglé gave, had a major influence on another French sociologist **Louis Dumont's** thoughts which we will discuss later. Louise Dumont is considered to be the most authoritative scholar on the caste-system, although his ideas face intense criticism by the later historians and sociologists. For now let's return to Bouglé's thoughts. Celestin Bouglé opined that caste-system can be identified by its **three characteristic manifestations**. Firstly, a hereditarily-determined occupation; secondly, hierarchy and thirdly, repulsion, i.e. the alienation of one caste from another. Bouglé did not subscribe to the idea that it were the Brahmins who framed the caste-system. On the contrary, the caste-system came into being due to the socio-economic changes, the Brahmins gave it a legitimation only. The idea of purity and pollution was the main factor behind the hierarchy present in the system. Thus, Bouglé completely rejected the racial interpretation of the caste-system given by Risley. Bouglé's study on the caste-system can be counted among the most serious and effective studies of his time. Bouglé also accepted the idea of Senart that the varna-system is an idealised concept, while caste is a reality.

J. H. Hutton, whose book '*Caste in India*' came into print in 1946, was the last among the foremost scholars of the caste system

before 1947. Hutton considered the existing theories interpreting the caste-system inappropriate, as these did not properly grasp the reality of caste. He enumerated fifteen characteristic features of caste, prominent among them were environmental segregation, magical beliefs, totemism, idea of purity-pollution, the doctrine of Karma, clash of races, the prejudices concerning complexion of skin, and the tendency to exploit by dint of hierarchy. But there were numerous inconsistencies throughout Hutton's theory. On one hand, he does not put any causal explanation about the emergence and development of the caste-system and on the other hand, for him caste becomes an aggregate of different social groups. Hutton was altogether unsuccessful in comprehending their interrelationships. Dumont, **Pocock** and all the later sociologists rejected Hutton's theory. It was a kind of an eclectic theory that made a compilation of the different apparent manifestations of caste.

During the colonial period, some Indian scholars also made sociological studies of the caste-system. But they were somehow similar to the interpretations that we have discussed above. In 1911, **S.N. Ketkar** published his book '*History of Caste in India*', in which he gave thoughts similar to those of Celestin Bougle and rejected the racial theory. In 1916, **D. Ebetson** published his book '*Punjab Caste*' which deals with the castes of Punjab. In it he stressed on the role of tribes in the emergence of castes. But the main interpretative frameworks which existed before independence were mentioned above.

Before proceeding it is important to clarify here that **Ronald Inden, Nicholas Dirks** and many **Subaltern Historians** such as **Partha Chatterjee** have put forward the view about the studies of the colonial administrators that they invent or imagine the caste system. It was the colonial ruling class which established the caste system in its ossified form. In order to break Indian people's resistance, the colonial state also used knowledge and culture apart from economic and political means. According to them, the use of knowledge and culture was even more important than the economic and political factors. As per their view, caste becomes a construct of the colonialists. This entire viewpoint faces two problems. On the one hand, if you agree to it, that the caste system is a construct

of the colonialists, a specimen of colonial knowledge, which was prepared to establish their dominance over the Indian people, then you become uncritical towards the pre-colonial India without saying so. Attributing each and every wrong to the Enlightenment rationality and modernity, you declare everything including imperialism, communalism, caste system, etc as colonial constructs and knowingly or unknowingly glorify the pre-British India. For example, Nicholas Dirks admits that caste existed before the arrival of colonialism in India but it was just one among various other social identities. But colonialism constructed caste as the only effective identity and classified the whole Indian population accordingly. Doing so, the Occident successfully degraded the Orient, made it appear as an inferior civilization, and projected the entire Indian population as backward and primitive. Caste was presented as an natural peculiarity of the Indian people and was condemned. But on this whole outlook it can be said that while on the one hand the colonialism did indeed play an important role in ossifying the caste system and it increased the rigidity of caste divide, it is also true that even after the establishment of colonialism there were multiple identities in the Indian society. For example, the linguistic and tribal identities, which were also used as instruments of identity politics.

Secondly, political and economic hegemony was not at all secondary in the project of colonial domination; on the contrary, the efforts that the colonialists made to understand the Indian society, in order to be able to rule it, were made precisely to make the political and economic domination possible and more effective. It was no conspiracy. In fact, the colonialists really believed that to rule India in a more effective manner, it must be understood properly. The process already began with **William Jones** establishing the **Asiatic Society** in 1784 and it continued thereafter. We may indeed argue that the colonialists tasted both success and failure in this endeavour of theirs, and they were not fully successful in understating India “in the proper way”! But to term their failure as a conscious conspiracy and a construct is to forcibly impose anti-modernity and anti-Enlightenment ideas of postmodernist, postcolonial theory and Orientalism on the Indian history. **Suzanne Bayly**, in her book *‘Caste and Politics in*

Eighteenth Century India’, has criticised this line of thought of Nicholas Dirks from her point of view (which we can definitely criticise), and has argued that Brahminism and its hegemony were not a product of colonialism, though they were certainly strengthened by it. The brahmins played a significant role in construction of this colonial knowledge, and the collaboration of the colonial state and native elites could be discerned throughout this entire process. The collaboration between the colonial state and the native elites and feudal classes was neither an imagination, nor a construct, but was a stark reality.

So, it is a futile effort to present the caste-related studies of the colonialists as a machination of the rationality of Enlightenment, and to show “**Oriental innocence**” (**Ashish Nandi**) as a ‘*passive victim*’. The celebration of the pre-colonial past by historians of Subaltern Studies and the academics motivated by Orientalism of **Edward Said** and post-modernism in the name of opposing modernity and Enlightenment, is a flight of imagination and a mental construct of these historians. **Sumit Sarkar** in his book ‘*Beyond Nationalist Frames*’ has shown that this cultural critique of colonialism, ultimately aligns itself with the revivalism of the extreme Right, though it superficially terms communalism also as a colonial construct (which is more accurate in this context as compared to caste). This whole logic is a circular and a self-defeating one.

Post-Independence Sociological Studies: Disregard of History and Essentialization of the Caste System

Suvira Jaiswal while commenting on post-Independence sociological studies in her book *Caste: Origin, Function and Dimension of Change*, states that these studies, in a way ignore the aspect of history. The whole stress goes into the study of the intricacies of the contemporary nature of caste, but they do not venture to delve into its origin or at least do not do so sincerely. To a great extent, this analysis seems to be correct. Since, while studying the caste system these sociologists ignore its evolution and origin, and see it in its contemporaneity only, they arrive at extremely divergent and incomplete conclusions. Undoubtedly, these studies provide several insights regarding the contemporary

caste system. But, while they are unable to use these insights, historians use them.

Among these sociologists, the most renowned was **Louis Dumont**, whose book *Homo Heirarchicus* has a Biblical eminence for sociologists studying caste system, irrespective of whether they are in concord or discord with it. One of the reasons is that, Dumont's interpretation is chiseled with great sophistry. No sharp contradiction is apparent in it. Different concepts have been made to fit in a precisely sculpted structure. As the name of the book suggests, it is about those people or communities, who do not follow the principle of equality. According to Dumont, the Occidental man has faith on the principle of equality by virtue of his individualism (**Homo equalis** or **Homo economicus**). But every society needs hierarchy. Dumont says, the moment you imbibe a value, you are in effect accepting a hierarchy. The greatest peculiarity of the Hindu society lies in that, its hierarchy is harmonious. This hierarchy, namely the caste system, has nothing to do with material and economic factors. The element that determines the caste system and even builds it up, is the ritualistic hierarchy. This ritualistic doctrine is the basic structure (as Levi Strauss means it) that is determining the reality here. Brahminical ritualistic ideology constructs the social reality in the Hindu society. The most fundamental element of this ideology is to build up an entire social hierarchy based on the logic of purity and pollution with the Brahmin at its apex, and the untouchables, at its bottom. Every caste is defined on the basis of its relationship with other castes, and consequently we get a complete structure of castes organised in a hierarchical manner. Dumont has answer also for the question about the origin of the idea of purity and pollution! He contends that this idea is that structure of fundamental values that builds reality, and it is pre-given. Such a set of values exists in every society. Hierarchy is an essential value, and every society needs it. In this sense, the caste system endows the Hindu society with such a hierarchical structure, which is uncompetitive, harmonious, unchangeable, and makes the society stable. Dumont repeatedly places these peculiarities vis-à-vis the Western society, and in a way subtly asks the question, what have the values of equality and individualism given to the Occidental Civilization? Thus Dumont, in the words of

Gerald Berreman, adopts a brahminical view of caste. It is in a way equivalent to justifying the caste-system. Dumont fails to explain the fact, in any way, though he is obliged to admit it, that with the development of industries and capitalism, caste restrictions on occupation and commensal prejudices have been weakening steadily, as demonstrated by **G S Ghurye** and **E K Gough**; the only characteristic feature that persists is endogamy. Dumont thinks that these political, social and economic changes have no bearing on the caste system, rather they get absorbed within the caste system. Dumont does not draw any conclusion from these changes. For him the Hindu society, along with its caste system and hierarchy, becomes an ideal, unchanging society. Obviously, we need not spend many words to refute Dumont's thesis.

Javeed Alam has remarked somewhere rightly indeed, that most of such sociological ideologies are in reality designed to enter into a **shadow-boxing** with Marxism and the materialist dialectical historical methodology. In fact, Dumont does criticise Marx for predicting the elimination of caste with the arrival and development of railways and large-scale industries. Actually, Marx was talking about the disintegration of caste-based hereditary division of labour, and in this aspect Marx's prediction has been proved more or less correct. Dumont thinks that since the Indian social structure is unchangeable, eternal, hence its history cannot be written. This point of view aligns markedly close with the old colonial viewpoint, to which **Edward John Thomson**, father of **E P Thomson**, has given a remarkably wonderful expression. Thomson said, India is a country singularly bereft of history. On this idea of Dumont, **Irfan Habib** has aptly written:

“If such is to be the history of India, to fit a contemporary western sociologist's image of the caste system, is it not more likely that there is something wrong with this image rather than with Indian history? It may, in fact, well be that there is a good historical explanation for Dumont's excessively narrow view of caste. During the last hundred years and more, the hereditary division of labour has been greatly shaken, if not shattered. As a result, this aspect has increasingly receded into the background within the surviving domain of caste. The purely religious and personal aspects have, however, been less

affected. (One can see that this is by no means specific to India: religious ideology survives long after the society for which the particular religion has served as a rationalization has disappeared)” (Irfan Habib, 1995. *Caste in Indian History*, ‘Essays in Indian History’, Page 164, Tulika Books, New Delhi)

A whole lot of sociologists have studied the caste system after Dumont. They have drawn attention towards the use of casteist consciousness by the affluent elite classes born in every caste in post-Independence India, and have shown the way the caste equations are being used in electoral politics. Two aspects can be discerned as we go through these studies, that remain today as the characteristic features of caste politics. One is that, in every caste, dalits also included, there has emerged an affluent class which, in order to garner votes or to have usufruct of the resources, or to establish its monopoly over the access to them, invokes the caste-consciousness of the plebeians of their own caste. This aspect can be prominently seen in the politics of BSP, SP, RJD and parties of their ilk, and all the electoral candidates, even of the BJP and the Congress, who use their caste identity at the grass-root level, and frame caste-based equations. Eventually, when the election results are out, the different caste elites enter into mutual bargaining, deals, and negotiations, and on the basis of these exchanges, the ruling alliance is put together. In other words, in its mutual rivalry, the ruling class makes use of the caste equation. The other aspect which is the more significant, is that the electoral parties which claim to represent all the castes, the dalit caste included, are the electoral parties of elites of these castes, and these elite classes of the different castes join hands to oppress the masses and to keep the people divided and foment caste consciousness among them. Notwithstanding these important insights, the greatest shortcoming of these sociological studies is that they do not pay serious attention to the history of caste system. Leaving aside some cursory mention, the understanding of these people about the emergence of caste system and its subsequent development is inappropriate. This is the reason why they cannot give any explanation of the changes that take place in the phenomenon of the caste. Their total attention is focused on the study of the dynamics of the contemporary phenomenon of caste. But the irony is that, a balanced understanding even about this dynamics can be

reached only when, one has a clear view on the emergence and development of the caste system.

It is the lack of a historical vision that does not allow the whole lot of sociologists to comprehend the dynamics of the caste-system and often the sociologists see the caste system as a static system, which consequently becomes the identity of the Hindu/Indian society, and its fundamental characteristic or logic. Something which has always been there and will be there forever. Many a times, such theorization goes to the extent of justifying the caste system, as is done by **P.A. Sorokin**. Sorokin has made the persistence of the caste system through ages, that is, its sustainability, the basis for its justification. His logic goes like this, the reason that the caste system still exists is that, it gives the people of the society a satisfactory hierarchy. Here also one can notice the inherent preconceived notion, that the caste system is an unchanging phenomenon that has been providing the Hindu society with a semblance of stability. In a similar vein, **Nirmal Bose** has also considered the the caste system to be an unchanging factor which provides stability. He thinks that, in the society the caste system saves people from getting uprooted, since it ensures them, their right over their occupations. Monopoly over occupation gives people a sense of security.

In order to look for the reasons behind the trend that is there in these sociological studies, of viewing the caste system as a static one, we cannot refer to this entirely diverse lot of sociologists. We must understand that this lacuna is actually the lacuna of the very academic discipline of sociology. The discipline of sociology was designed precisely to disprove the dialectical and historical materialistic outlook of Marxism. For instance, the sociological method of viewing the hierarchy as an indispensable necessity of every society, gives a legitimacy to the caste system also, and puts a question-mark on the goal of an egalitarian society itself, as propounded by Marxism. Afterwards, on the face of the riposte made by Marxism, the branch of sociology has also undergone through a number of changes and there have appeared a number of Marxist sociologists, who placed even **Marx** along with **Weber** and **Durkheim** as the founding father of the discipline of sociology. The basic prejudice or

preconceived notion of sociology is a positivist prejudice, whose roots can be seen in the ideas of **Auguste Comte**. In this essay we cannot write a critique of the entire discipline of sociology, but this much is clear that the **discrepancy present in the sociological studies of the caste system has its roots in the absence, rather a kind of conscious negation, of a historical outlook in this entire discipline.** As a result, studies made, divorcing contemporaneity completely from history, gives us some valuable fragmentary insights, but fail to provide us with any consistent approach or methodology of explaining the caste system.

Other than these sociological interpretations, the study on caste system done by **G. S. Ghurye** also made a significant contribution. On the whole, Ghurye put stress on the racial origin of the caste-system. Besides him, there were some other sociologists also, such as **N. K. Dutt**, **D. N. Majumdar** and **R. P. Chandra** who supported this idea of racial origin. These people are of the opinion that, the Aryans invaded the Indian subcontinent at its north-western area, and subjugated the people of Dravidian origin. To keep these subjugated people under a structural subordination, the Brahmins constructed the theory of purity/pollution. With this theory at the base, the caste hierarchy was designed according to relative purity/pollution in comparison to the Brahmins, and thus came the caste system into being. But as Suvira Jaiswal has argued, there are no evidence to substantiate this theory. Sociologists have also debated a lot over the difference between caste and *varna*. **Max Weber** saw *varna* as a phenomenon akin to the European 'estate'. **Trautman** declared caste to be a real phenomenon while *varna* was a phenomenon similar to the 'estate'. There are sociologists who are of the opinion that *varna* system gives a bookish description of the caste system, which provides an idealised categorization. Castes are a real phenomenon, which, as they were born, got successively ensconced within these *varnas*. That is why we can witness different localised patterns of co-option of castes into the *varnas*, while the latter have a pan-Indian character. But one thing is common everywhere. The scale, or definition of purity of every caste or the unit of its measurement is the highest purity of the Brahmins. Which means that all the castes get their places within the caste system (hierarchy) depending on their relative distance from the Brahmins.

The difference determined between caste and *varna* by the sociologists is also only and only the difference decided on the basis of the contemporary caste system. Nobody disagrees with the fact that these notions are different. But the way the sociologists, without developing any understanding of the evolution and development of these categories, have presented the *varna* system as ‘book view of caste’ and the *jatis* as ‘field view of caste’ is totally ahistoric. Ancient history reveals it, that at those beginning phases, *jati* and *varna* were used synonymously. But when the word *varna vyavastha* was used, the implication was that the classic, idealised system of the four *varnas* was being discussed, which was mentioned for the first time in the ‘**Purushasukta**’ of the later part of **Zgveda**, according to which the Vedic society was divided into four *varnas* – *Brahman*, *Rajanya*, *Vis* and *Æudra*. Using the word *jati* meant that we were talking of those tribal groups which were assimilated into the Vedic society, and depending on different influencing factors, were considered as a part of one or the other of the four *varnas*. But so long castes were yet to emerge, the words *Jati* and *Varna* were used synonymously. We witness use of the word *jati* for the first time in the period prior to circa 200 BC. **Suvira Jaiswal** considers that it was the period when the large-scale proliferation of castes was yet to be a wide-spread phenomenon, and the use of the word *jati* in the literature of the period immediately after the Vedic period, especially during the time of Buddha, was not itself a sign of a full-fledged caste system coming into existence. In effect, the word *jati* was still used to mean *varna* only. Historians are divided in their opinions about how the transition from *varna* towards *jati* took place, and to have a fair understanding, we must observe briefly the historiography of ancient India.

Origin and Development of the Caste System: Problems of Historiography

Suvira Jaiswal tells that both the words *varna* and *jati* are used in ‘**Ashtadhyayi**’ of **Panini**. Panini belonged to the period around circa 200 BC. In ‘**Brihatsamhita**’ of **Varahmihira** also *jati* and *varna* were used synonymously. But in ‘**Yajnyavalkyasmṛiti**’ there is one instance where *jati* and *varna* come with different connotations, but, several times they are used synonymously also.

Clearly, till 200 BC the development of the system of castes did not reach a decisive stage.

Among the historians of ancient India, both **Iravati Karve** and **Romila Thapar** (notwithstanding having different opinions on numerous occasions) agree that the origin of caste system should actually be explored in the Harappan civilization before the arrival of the Aryans. Romila Thapar is of the opinion that, some basic elements of the caste system such as groups divided on the basis of heredity which controlled the institution of marriage, the idea of purity/pollution, and the elements of the *jajmani* system, were all incipient in the Harappan civilization itself. Romila Thapar concludes that the Great Bath of Mohen Jo-daro was actually meant for some ritual connected with purity/pollution. But this seems to be more like a flight of imagination based on a blend of fractured facts and evidence. Aryans are exonerated from the crime of introducing the caste system and varna system, and the caste-system becomes a natural endowment of the Indian subcontinent. That is, there is something (which is) completely Indian in the caste system. This becomes a prominent feature of the Indian way of life and system of ideas. Similar notions were forwarded earlier also. It is certainly not the motive of Romila Thapar to make an Indianised essentialization of the caste system, but on the objective plane, her thesis supports this conclusion. And the most significant thing is that, it has no evidence in its support, rather there are several contra-evidences.

If we make a perusal of the emergence of the caste system in the history of ancient India, we observe that it is inseparably linked with the emergence of classes, state, and patriarchy in the society. A consistent understanding of this history is essential because without it, the historicity of caste and the mindset connected with the caste system cannot be understood, and to us also the casteist mindset and the caste system will become a natural trait of the Indian people. A dialectical and historical materialistic interpretation of ancient Indian history, can be considered to begin with **Damodar Dharmanand Kosambi**. According to Kosambi one can find evidence of the beginning of the varna system at the end of the *Zgvedic* period. But, the system of castes does not grow simultaneously with it. When the Vedic civilization spread eastward

from the north-western frontiers, caste emerged along with the assimilation of new tribes into the Vedic society. We will present our views on this interpretation in detail in the coming pages. **Morton Klass** also studies the origin of the caste system. Klass comes to the conclusion that castes originated right in the prehistoric era with the beginning of agriculture. The tribes having access to cultivable lands turned into high castes, whereas the tribes coming into this region from other areas became the lower castes. These castes voluntarily accepted their subordinate status vis-a-vis the other castes that already had the access to arable land and practised agriculture. But we can find no evidence in history to support this theory. The notion working behind this theory is that the caste system came into being with the beginning of surplus production i.e. with the beginning of agriculture. But surplus production cannot on its own create the caste system unless a Brahminical ideology also is present there. This Brahminical ideology was the ideological apparatus to institutionalise class division in the form of the system of varnas. This is the reason why caste system emerged in the north-east long after the stage of surplus production was reached and classes came into existence, when the Brahminical ideology gave this division of classes, its casteist form. Moreover, Morton Klass's theory of the transition from clans/tribes to castes can explain the emergence of those castes only who are engaged in production. In his schema, the origin of the brahmin caste itself, remains unexplained. Besides, Morton Klass is also incorrect when he opines that caste system emerged almost simultaneously in the entire Indian subcontinent. Historical evidence now reveal it clearly that caste system spread in the southern and eastern India afterwards, and it acquired an form vastly different from the caste system of the north and north-western India.

Besides this, there is also a **theory of the Dravidian origin** of the evolution of castes, according to which, the Dravidian civilization had some elements which gave birth to the caste system. One such theory puts stress on the concept of *tinai*, in ancient south Indian Sangam literature. According to this, *tinai* is a word used to connote a region. Five *tinais* are mentioned which were occupied by different communities. The socio-economic conditions in these *tinais* were altogether different. In some places

agrarian society was coming into existence, while in others, elements of the pastoral society still existed. Fishing was the mainstay of the economy in the *tinais* of the coastal areas. When fusion started between these societies, then people of *tinais* with advanced production relations started to construct higher castes. But this theory cannot properly explain the origins of the caste system. This is due to the fact that the *tinais* mention five different geographical-ecological regions, and the communities inhabiting these areas did not belong to a society divided into classes. The society whose characteristic feature is the caste system, is in reality a unified society with definite property relations.

Another reason that gave birth to the theory of Dravidian origin, is the theory of untouchability of the sacred communities in the Dravidian civilization. According to this theory, a holy man is actually a carrier of all sorts of impurities, and these deadly impurities resident in him are contagious. But here the relation of the pure and the polluted is just opposite to the one found in the caste system. Historical evidence have now demonstrated that the doctrine of purity/pollution can originate in many nomadic and pastoral societies, where often, according to a sociologist named **Bruce Lincoln**, rise priest and warrior classes. In this era of magical world outlook one class performs its role by sacrificing animals for enhancing the cattle wealth through rituals, while the other class performs the role of leadership in the process of capturing the cattle wealth of other tribes by attacking them. Other remaining classes formed the common plebeian masses. The first class forms the class of priests, and often constructs the doctrines of purity/pollution. But this class cannot by itself become the cause of the origin of the caste system. Thus, the theory of Dravidian origin also is a scheme only for which no historical evidence exists.

Kosambi's theories on the emergence of the *varna* system are significant. Many ideas of his theory were later found to be inappropriate. However, his methodology presents a consistent interpretation of the existing evidence and makes on its basis, extremely logical simulations about the unknown aspects. According to Kosambi, an Aryan community had already settled in the Indian subcontinent before the coming of the Vedic Aryans. Chances are there that this group got assimilated with the remaining

elements of the Harappan Civilization. When the Vedic Aryans came, the people of this group clashed with them. In Zgveda these very people have been called *dasyu* or *dāsa*. A few positive comments have also been made about some powerful chiefs of these tribes/clans of *dasyus* or *dāsas*. The term *asura* has been used for them. But it seems that, at that time the word *asura* was used to mean a deity. Because we see that it has also been used for *Indra*, who was the chief *this-worldly* (*ih-laukik*) deity of the Vedic Aryans. For the deities of the *other-world* (*parlok*) the word *deva* was used. It has been said about these *dasyu/dāsas* that their complexion (*varna*) was nigrescent or dark which shows that they had undergone intermingling with the residual elements of the Harappan civilization, and this is quite possible that they mixed with the other aboriginal people as well. Many references of the clashes of the *dasyus/ dāsas* with the Aryans are found in the Zgveda. Eventually, these Vedic Aryans vanquished the *dāsas*. The meanings of the words '*asura*' and '*dāsa*' changed with the defeat of the *dāsas*. Since the word '*asura*' was used for the *dāsa* chieftains, so later the word '*sura*' came to be used for the Aryan chieftains/gods. When the *dāsas/dasyus* were completely brought under the subjugation of the Vedic Aryans, the modern meaning of the word '*dāsa*' i.e. a slave, came in use. These subjugated *dasyus/ dāsas* got transformed into the Āudra caste. According to D. D. Kosambi, new production relations came into existence along with the Āudra caste coming into being and with the Vedic Civilization reaching the Gangetic plains. With the expansion of agriculture and beginning of the use of iron, the stage of surplus production was attained. During the introduction of this stage, new tribes were getting assimilated in the society of Vedic Aryans. According to Kosambi, with this, castes based on principle of endogamy came into being. Romila Thapar opines the same but in a slightly different manner. According to her, the vanquished tribes became the lower castes, whereas the victors became the upper castes.

According to Kosambi, the reference of the system of four *varnas* that we find in the '**Purushasukta**' of the **tenth mandala** of **Zgveda** at almost the close of the earlier Vedic age, was in reality manifesting class-division only. According to him, the *varna* system in that primitive stage of production was indeed a symptom of class

division, and what we are calling by the name *varna* in this stage, was actually class and nothing else. There is ample amount of historical evidence in support of this argument of Kosambi. For instance, the system of four *varnas* that is described in 'Purushasukta', does not yet mention endogamy and hereditary division of labour. That is, none of the basic characteristic features by which we identify the caste system today, were in existence yet. Ramsharan Sharma has also confirmed it.

Kosambi has considered the birth of slave labour also, as one of the origins of the emergence of class division in the later half of the period of Vedic society. Definitely, in the Indian subcontinent slave-labour has never been used to that scale in productive activities, as the scale on which it was used in the ancient Greek or Roman civilizations. But the logic put forward by Kosambi in this context, and which seems to be correct, is that the emergence of slave labour, in a primitive tribal or a nomadic pastoral society has a significance in itself, and it makes no difference, that to what extent it was used in production activities. The moot point is that, whatever be the extent to which slave labour is put into use, it is a symptom of disintegration of communal relations. The coming into existence of the *Āudra varna* in the later half of the Zgvedic period and especially in the post-Vedic period, their use as slaves, the collusion of Brahmins and the Katriyas to oppress and exploit the *Vaishyas* to a certain extent, and to oppress and exploit the shudras to the hilt, were the signs that class society had arrived. But we must present sufficient arguments to show that, at this primitive stage of production, there was basically and mainly, an overlapping present between *varna* and class.

This aspect was elucidated by the excellent historian of ancient India **Ramsharan Sharma**. Sharma makes it clear that a stratification/categorization was in existence, there in the Zgvedic age, but that could not be given the name 'class' yet. Slave labour was also present in the form of female slave labour only, who were not only engaged in domestic labour, but many a times they were used to replenish the depleted number of women in the victor tribes; i.e they got assimilated into the victorious tribe/caste. But neither was there surplus large enough yet, that these categories could transform into classes, nor did they acquire the traits of *varna* or caste, such

as endogamy, hereditary occupation (division of labour), and rigid hierarchy. In the form of slave labour, there were *Āudras*, who were none other than the subordinated *dasyus/dāsas*. Their children sired by the higher *varnas* used to be absorbed in the Vedic society without any discrimination. The social categorization between the four *varnas* that came into being in the later half of the Zgvedic period, was not yet a *varna*/caste system as such, rather it was a manifestation of the embryonic class-division in the society. Ramsharan Sharma called it ‘small scale non-monetary peasant society’, in which inequity in distribution had already started, but powerful elements of tribal society (nomadic pastoral society) were still present. Around Circa 1000 BC to 700 BC, with the beginning of use of iron, the Gangetic plain was cleared off forests, use of iron plough was started, that enhanced productivity, and the amount of surplus production crossed the threshold, creating conditions conducive for the formation of class and state. Another historian **B. N. S. Yadav**, submitted some new evidence in support of Ramsharan Sharma’s interpretation. He showed that this process of consolidation of class-society continued during the period extending from the 7th century BC to the 1st century AD. In this very period, new tribes got assimilated in the *varna*-based society and new castes came into being as a result of it. In this period another phenomenon also appeared on the scene. The hold of the Kcatriyas and the Brahmins on the *Āudras* got weakened to a certain degree and the latter gradually started getting transformed into a dependent agrarian population in which previously, the vaishyas were the majority. The vaishyas who still pursued agricultural activities, were on the decline on the ritualistic plane and many of them started descending into the shudra *varna*. The rest of them went on to take trade as their occupation. Thus, there was a fall in the population of the vaishyas and they made trade their principal occupation.

What was the fundamental cause behind this change that appeared in the *varna*/caste system? The principal reason behind these changes was the emergence of a new mode of production and new production relations. We have evidence of land grants from the first century AD. Brahmins were the principal beneficiaries of these land grants. However, they were not the exclusive beneficiaries and sometimes it were the kcatriyas while in the other cases it could be

the vaishyas as well. The brahmin-kcatriya alliance had the main sway in the state authority. During the Maurya period, this feature was clearly visible in the state power. The main function of Brahmins was still priestly activities but with the emergence of feudalism in its embryonic form and with Brahmins becoming the recipients of land grants, changes appeared in their character. They were now also emerging as landlords. The character of the kcatriya *varna* was already that of warriors and landlords. The brahmin-kcatriya alliance still assumed the role of ruling class. However, during seven hundred years from the fourth century to eleventh century AD to mature, when feudal production relations kept developing, there appeared fundamental changes in the roles of the four *varnas*. We would discuss more about it afterwards.

Suvira Jaiswal agrees with the description of the feudal mode of production as given by Ramsharan Sharma and B.N.S Yadav. According to her, the objection raised by **Harbans Mukhia**, that the then prevalent social formation could not be called feudal because serfdom did not have any significant presence, as inconsequential. Indian feudalism did not need serfs as a separate class. The subordinate status of the shudras and the untouchable castes fulfilled this need. Many times, the shudras became sharecroppers. Actually the partial overlapping that can still be seen to this day between the landless labourers and the lower castes has its roots in the times of feudalism itself. Jaiswal argues that ignoring the class functions of the caste system would be tantamount to ignoring its economic and political aspects. And if these fundamental economic and political aspects of the caste system are neglected, then nothing remains of it other than endogamy and hereditary division of labour. In such a case, caste system would become an ahistoric part of the Indian life, history and society, without any beginning or end, and hence also a natural element of Indian life, history and society. It is known to us that many ideologues and organizations who talk about dalit liberation, say similar things on this question and unwittingly naturalise the caste system. This leads towards the idealization and, in a way, legitimization of the caste system. According to Suvira Jaiswal, in the context of Indian society before the arrival of colonialism, we can find numerous evidence showing that whenever there was a relation of **correspondence** between the caste system

and class division, the caste hierarchy got reinforced and became more rigid; on the other hand, wherever and whenever the ritualistic hierarchy present among the castes stood in opposition to the dynamics of class division, a process of fusion and fission was engendered within the caste system, which brought in significant changes in the caste hierarchy in a gradual process.

Suvira Jaisawal has criticised Kosambi, Ramsharan Sharma and Irfan Habib for making an external factor, viz, assimilation of new tribes into the folds of the Vedic society, responsible for the emergence of castes within the *varna* system. Whereas it is true on the one hand that the eastward expansion of the Vedic Civilization and the assimilation of new tribes within it gave birth to the castes, concurrently it is also true that if the elements of caste division (namely, the hereditary division of labour and *varna* division on the basis of the elements of endogamy) did not already exist within the *varna* system then the mere induction of new tribes will not by themselves give rise to new castes. According to Suvira Jaisawal, this belief that the pre-Vedic tribes used to follow endogamy while there was no such culture among the Vedic Aryans is false. She has given evidence to the contrary that with the emergence of patriarchy, the tradition of clan endogamy was on the way out, and with the imposition of subordinate status on women, the seeds of caste endogamy were sown. Moreover, we can find evidence of existence of such pre-Vedic tribes, where the tradition of endogamy was still absent. Therefore, it cannot be argued that castes based on the practice of endogamy emerged only with the assimilation of new tribes within the fold of the Vedic society. On the other hand, it was in the Vedic society along with the origin of the caste of shudras only that the process of treating certain forms of manual labour as inferior had begun. In such a scenario, when the tribes having expertise in the new kinds of productive labour were included in the Vedic society, they were included in the form of different castes and at the same time the hereditary division of labour also began. This was the reason why **the entire tribe did not get transformed into a single caste.** Rather what happened was that the **upper priest class got assimilated with the Brahmins and other classes with the other varnas of the Vedic society.** A lot of people from several tribes also got assimilated with the Katriya varna. In a

nutshell, it can be said that the ground for castes based on endogamy and hereditary division of labour had already been existing in the Vedic society and that is why the assimilation of the new tribes into the Vedic society could become as a factor in the origin of castes. The assimilation of other tribes into the vedic varna system continued right up to the later half of the middle ages. This could not be in itself the main force behind the creation of castes. In this context the position taken by Subira Jaisawal appears to be more balanced. In all these developments, it was the internal process of class division within the Vedic society which was mainly responsible. The inclusion of the external tribes into the Vedic varna system was continued till the latter half of medieval era. It on its own could not have become the reason for the emergence of caste. Suvira Jaiswal's stand on this subject appears to be more balanced.

If we look into the history of the period from the end of the Vedic period to the beginning of the period of ancient republics, one thing clearly emerges out. Origin of the *varna* system and the coming of castes into existence was an extensive and complex historical process. Several aspects of that period still remain untouched and do not have enough evidence related to them. But this much is certain that the **varna system was constantly dynamic right from its inception**. Even the form which the caste system assumed after the emergence of castes was also dynamic. The *prime mover* behind their dynamism was the changes that occurred in the mode of production and the production-relations. The *varna*-class overlap is clearly visible at the time of emergence of the class society. However, this overlapping could not last very long and it was bound to be ultimately transformed into a relation of correspondence.

The reason behind this is that the varna system at the moment of its inception was the ideological legitimization of the existing class relations, but it was an ideological legitimization which was peculiar in itself. In all the societies of the world, with the emergence of class rule, there evolved ideologies to legitimise the rule of the ruling class. But in India this ideology had not only taken a religious form, but got ossified into a ritualistic form. Obviously, when a ruling class under its rule uses its ideology to ossify the prevalent

structure of class divisions in the society ritualistically then that ideological legitimization fails to keep itself in conformity with the motion of development of production relations and mode of production. In such a situation a gap will arise in the old ideological legitimization or the ideologically ossified form of previous class divisions and the new class divisions. Surely, this gap does not mean that there will be co-relation or correspondence between the class divisions prevailing in the society and its ideological ritualistic legitimization. What it means is that whenever a radical change in the class divisions takes place, there will be tremors in the old ritualistic structure and it will need some corresponding adjustments.

Such changes abound in the entire history of caste system and caste ideology. And these changes have taken place spatially as well as temporally. That is to say in the same era the caste hierarchies have been different in different regions. For instance, by the time the Vedic Civilization reached the societies of southern and the eastern India, the agrarian economy was already considerably developed and the status of the agrarian castes within the caste system too underwent changes. Consequently, we do not find *keatriya* and *vaishya* *varnas* in these regions. We will discuss these later. But at present it is sufficient to point it out that one can find radical changes and diversities in the caste-system, spatially as well temporally. There is just one feature in the *varna*/caste-system that persists. What is it? It is that the ritualistic caste divisions which take place on the basis of class structure of any region depends on the brahmanical ideology, which in turn based on the doctrine of purity/pollution. However, the consequent caste hierarchy which arises out of it, varies in different regions based on the prevailing production relations and the production system. This becomes still clearer if we look at the changes which have taken place in the entire *varna*/caste system and the status of different *varnas*/castes along with the changes in the production relations.

Changes in the Status of Different *varnas*/castes with the Changes in the Mode of Production and Production Relations

Suvira Jaiswal has drawn our attention towards the changes in the status of the Brahmin *varna*/caste in the caste system. It could be clearly seen that the changes taking place in the production

relations and class structure were the main cause behind these changes as well. **Romila Thapar** has shown that in a nomadic pastoral society the main source of income of the Brahmins was in form of gifts presented to them. This source was declared as the only permitted source of income even in the contemporary religious *samhitas* (codes). However, with the transition to agriculture, land grants replaced gifts of things. This practice of land grants transformed the Brahmins, who were earlier priests only, into landlords also. This brought in a significant change in the status of Brahmins. When we move onwards from the Vedic period to the history of the *janapadas* and then to the Mauryan period, we see Brahmins assuming the positions of the rulers also. Many such states developed whose rulers happened to be Brahmin. Now the functions of *kcatriyas*, who were earlier believed to be inferior to Brahmins, were no longer treated as prohibited or lowly for Brahmins. On the contrary the status of such Brahmins was elevated in the caste hierarchy. What is surprising is that by the early medieval era those Brahmins began to be treated as inferior who used to take alms or do priestly work, and the status of those Brahmins got rose in the rank who had become rulers-administrators or landlords. Why did these changes take place? Clearly, the transition from a pre-feudal social formation to a feudal social formation, brought in fundamental changes in the status of the Brahmins. Besides, a lot of new castes came into being within the Brahmin caste. The emergence of the caste of *brahm-kcatriya*, as mentioned by Suvira Jaisawal, can have three probable sources; first, matrimonial relations between the Brahmins and *kcatriyas*; second, the function of *kcatriyas* viz., governance-administration, being adopted by Brahmins, and third, the prior existence of the root of such a caste (*brahm-kcatriya*) in the form of the *Puru* clan.

The way in which the status of *brahmins* in the caste hierarchy and their functions as determined by caste ideology underwent changes, we can observe similar changes among the *kcatriyas* as well. New castes emerged from within the *kcatriyas* which had diverse sources. For instance, we have now sufficient historical sources regarding the formation of *Rajput* caste which show that this caste did not possess the status of *kcatriyas varna* from the beginning. This caste was formed by the fusion between the

Indianised foreign elements that conquered other tribes and established their rule and the members coming from other *varnas* and some native tribes. This was a warrior landowning caste formed by the amalgamation of the elements coming from different sources. This caste established matrimonial alliances with the *kcatriyas* and other upper castes as well which elevated their ritualistic status. In this entire process the people of this community adopted the name of *rajputra* which subsequently turned into Rajput.

In south India there existed no such warrior tribes. There the emerging land-owning peasant castes performed the functions of the warrior tribes. Consequently, no *kcatriya varna* appeared there. When the process of state formation among the agriculture-based tribes reached a decisive stage, big regional states came into being. The kings of these states came from the peasant communities only. And then the Brahmins from north India were in a way imported into these states. These Brahmin elements also got fused with the priestly elements within those tribes and they formed the Brahmin castes in south India. The ruling peasant castes were assimilated in the *varna* system as shudras by these Brahmins. However, the status of shudras here was not the same as that in north and north-western India. They were included in the shudras *varna* as castes because by then, shudras had become the main peasant caste in the core regions where caste system had emerged. The status of the shudras in south India was much better because they were not only an agrarian caste, but they were the ruling class as well. Thus, for instance, one such caste, *vellala* in south India has been referred to as the patrons/protectors of Brahmins. Since, Brahmins had the ritualistic “power”, therefore, no other caste could perform their functions. But the character of the conventional power of the *kcatriya* was not other-worldly, but this-worldly, and hence the tasks which were traditionally reserved for them could be carried out by any other caste. In south India, this task was carried out by *Vellala* caste which enjoyed quite a high status in the south Indian caste hierarchy. Here those who were dependent, exploited and having slave-like status were termed as *asat shudras*. It was easier for brahmins to put forth such a proposition because long ago a distinction had been made between ‘*hîna*’ and ‘*ahîna*’ shudras in Brahman Samhitas. There were some shudras whose pollution

could not be rectified, whereas there were others whose pollution was not contagious and could be remedied. It was on this basis that the *Vellalas* were termed as **Sat** shudras whose position was quite high up in the caste system while the *adi-dravid* castes were termed as **asat** shudras whose position became similar to the serfs and extremely poor artisan castes, much like that of the shudras in the Vedic period in north and north-western India.

In Eastern India, too, such peasant castes came into being that reached the position of the ruling class. There too, no separate vaishya & katriya varnas came into being. Therefore, in Eastern and Southern India, we come across only two *varnas*—brahmin and shudra. In the coming centuries new castes were born within these very *varnas*—sometimes with the assimilation of new tribes and at other times, owing to the process of disintegration and fusion among the already existing castes. In this way, vaidyas and kayashtas came into existence in Bengal.

Ramsharan Sharma has shown how cultivation, which was originally an occupation of the vaishyas, became the principal occupation of the shudras. According to him, as the feudal practice of land grants started, the migration of brahmins to new areas led to the assimilation of new tribes into the *varna* system. These new tribes were assimilated in the shudra *varna* and agriculture became their main occupation. However, according to Suvira Jaiswal, with the advent of feudal mode of production, manual agricultural labour gradually became an ignoble occupation. And with this, the new peasant castes were inducted into the Vedic society as shudras and not as vaishyas. Besides, those vaishyas also who remained attached with agricultural occupation gradually turned into shudras. Those vaishyas, who took to trading on the basis of accumulated agricultural surplus, succeeded in retaining their vaishya status. Thus, with the emergence of the feudal mode of production, and the concurrent induction of new tribes into the Vedic society, the pattern of traditionally-determined occupation for vaishyas and shudras changed. Earlier the vaishyas were mainly engaged in farming, and a section of the poor shudras too were attached to the land as dependent cultivators. Both **Ramsharan Sharma** and **Suvira Jaiswal** have shown, how the connotation of the word ‘**Grihapati**’ was originally used to mean the chief of a tribal clan,

but went through a gradual change and came to be understood as the head of a peasant family in the era of Buddha. By following the gradual evolution of this term, we can get a complete description of how the division of labour, between the vaishyas and shudras (agriculture and trade) evolved.

Suvira Jaiswal also describes how the four varnas appeared in Maharashtra and Gujarat and how the new tribes got assimilated in all the four varnas. The reason behind it was that the spread of brahminical society, culture, and ideology had already begun before the rise of feudalism in those regions, i.e. between 500 BC & 200 AD. The change that came into the status of different *varna/jatis* brought in significant changes in the entire caste hierarchy as well. There are sufficient evidence to substantiate that the changes that took place in mode of production and production relations have time and again exerted pressure to usher change in the *varna/caste* system from within. **A gap between caste and class always remained, but only a blind person can claim that there is no clear correspondence between them. There have been times when this gap appears wider, and there have been times when it appears less.** At a particular moment in the dialectics of production relations and development of productive forces, untouchability was born. It is imperative to understand that process too.

Development of Untouchability : The Highest Stage of Development of Relations of Feudal Exploitation

With the emergence of *asat shudras* in southern and eastern India and with the transformation of the shudras into mainly peasant castes in northern and north-western India, the Untouchables (*achût*) came into existence as the most subjugated, most oppressed and exploited section of the society, who later came to known as dalits. We have already mentioned that the religious codes had made a distinction between the *hîna* and *ahîna* shudras long ago. For example, chandal caste was counted as shudra in the varna system, but it was placed in the category of *hîna* shudras. On the one hand untouchability came into existence among those who were at the lowest rung among the shudras, while on the other hand, when some forms of manual labour were declared to be of extremely inferior kind during the process of the development of

feudal production relations, then the element of untouchability was appended to the castiest ideology of purity/pollution. We can see that the idea purity/pollution has been present in the brahminical ideology as a variable. That is why many castes were declared to be untouchables much later. For instance, nowhere in the Vedic sources, occupations connected with leather work, or the caste of tanners and cobblers (*charmakar*) who did these jobs, were declared lowly or inferior. Just the opposite, it was customary to carry various materials required for the Vedic rituals, only in leather bags. It was in the 8th and the 9th century that the *charmakaras* were declared untouchables.

According to the thoughts of **Bhimrao Ambedkar** regarding the origin of untouchability, it was a conscious and deliberate act of the brahmins to make some castes untouchable; especially those who had been involved in resistance, still indulged in beef-eating and also adopted the Buddhist religion. But **Vivekananda Jha** has refuted this line of argument with evidence. Jha has demonstrated that the rise of untouchability had no relation with beef-eating and adopting the Buddhist religion. It was closely connected with the development of the feudal mode of production, which in order to make the exploitation and oppression of the exploited and the oppressed castes structural, gave this exploitation and oppression the extreme expression of untouchability. Some other scholars have also worked to explore the origin of untouchability, for example **G.L. Hart** who opines that untouchability was a product of the ancient Tamil society; **N. K. Dutta** considers the attitude of the Dravida communities towards the non-Dravidian communities to be the origin of untouchability; the German scholar **Fürer-Haimendorf** sees the development of urban civilization as the reason behind untouchability. However, Vivekanand Jha's work on this subject is considered to be the finest. He has shown that it was not the notion of purity and pollution which made certain tasks so inferior that people performing these tasks were declared untouchables; rather, the exploitation of some classes became so naked and barbaric, that the concept of pollution was attached to their occupation and the people in these occupations were declared untouchables. As it is its wont, the brahminical ideology has given the class division and exploitation a ritualistic form. Needless to

reiterate, we are not talking about overlapping of class and caste here, but religious ritualistic legitimation and ossification of the relations of exploitation and oppression that are inherent in the entire socio-economic formation. In this entire structure, as we have already mentioned, a relation of correspondence exists between caste and class.

Ramsharan Sharma, has clearly shown that the casteist restrictions and stereotypes pertaining to commensality, matrimonial alliances and untouchability too, have undergone a process of evolution and development. **Suvira Jaiswal** and **D.D. Kosambi** also have shown that there is indeed a history of the development of the idea of purity/pollution. The task of framing and propounding these ideas was done by the brahmins, both as a part of the ruling class as well as its ideologues. The function of these ideas was to provide permanence to the dominant relations of exploitation by ritualistically ossifying them. Whenever the old ritualistic structure became suffocatingly restrictive for the changes taking place in the class-equations, necessary adjustments and modifications were done in this structure. In this entire process, by the medieval period, among brahmins too, such divisions were created that some brahman castes were pauperised. In particular, there was a decline in the material and ritualistic status of those brahmins who used to live on alms and donations (*dān-dakshina*). **Declan Quigley** has mentioned the case of untouchable brahmins in his book '*The Interpretation of Caste*'. Thus, the status of the entire brahmin population too was not fixed and impervious to any change.

Vivekananda Jha has mentioned **four stages** in the origin and development of the untouchable castes, for which historical evidence are available. The first stage was the Vedic period. There is no mention of untouchability in the Zgvedic period. Even in the later Vedic period the Chandalas are mentioned as hīna shudras and a sense of repulsion is expressed towards them but there is no mention of untouchability in clear terms. The second stage was from 700 BC to 200 AD. Some castes clearly emerged as untouchable castes in this period. This is the period when slave-labour was extensively used in the economy, and the first century AD saw the rise of feudal mode of production. The third stage was

from 200 AD to 600 AD. In this period, some new tribal groups were inducted in the Aryan Vedic society as untouchable castes. And the fourth stage was from 600 AD to 1200 AD which is the high period of feudalism, and this is when untouchability appears on a large scale as a phenomenon. B.N.S. Yadav has drawn attention towards the fact that villages gained significance with the development of feudal economy, and there came a system of stable and static, which did not permit any mobility to the oppressed and exploited castes, especially to the artisanal castes. For Yadav, this factor also gave impetus to untouchability since it further degraded the lowest sections of the population.



While Buddhism and Jainism challenged the hegemony of the brahmins, they failed to pose any serious challenge to the varna/ caste system; rather, these religions strengthened the varna/caste system in certain respects. **Irfan Habib** writes that Buddhism and Jainism have rejected the religious legitimization of the caste system, but have accepted the caste system as a reality of the society. This seems to be correct because the prejudices that exist in these religions against slaves, farmers under debt, and along with them against women, is explicitly clear. When the vaishya trading castes with their rising economic might opposed the brahmin hegemonism and entered into the fold of Jainism, elements of the caste system also in a way penetrated Jainism, because the vaishya castes there too continued to follow the rigid conventions of caste-based occupations and endogamy. It would not be incorrect to say that today Jainism has to a large extent been transformed into an appendage of Hinduism. Irfan Habib also remarks that the emphasis on the principle of *karma* and non-violence by Buddhism in fact proved to be an anathema for the untouchable population, because while laying stress on these values, the occupations which were declared as lowly were generally the occupations of the untouchable castes. Buddhism also largely became irrelevant with the emergence of *Vaishnava* and *Shaiva* sects in the Hinduism and also due to the fact that it showed even more enthusiasm in prohibiting cow-slaughter. It was not due to the reason that Hinduism had re-established its claim on the notion of purity, as claims Louise Dumont; rather due to the fact that Hinduism had

once more got into step with the production relations of the changing times. Seen in this way Hinduism is a remarkably flexible religion, and as Weber has said, it is actually not a religion at all in the classical sense (however, this idea is incorrect as, according to **Weber** whereas a religion thrives on **dogma**, **doxa** prevails in Hinduism); **Ambedker**, in a way was right to remark that the core value of Hinduism is the caste system. In fact, this caste system too enhances the flexibility of Hinduism. The ideology of caste has given a useful instrument to the ruling classes through all the ages. It is such a flexible ideology, which, in all ages and especially in the pre-capitalist societies, provides the ruling classes with an instrument to consolidate their rule. It gives religious legitimation to the naked and barbaric exploitation of the ruling classes, and assumes the form of ritualistic ossification. Definitely, due to this ideology there persists a difference between caste and class. But until all the economic and political registers of caste essentially disappear (as it happened with the rise of the capitalist mode of production), a profound correspondence remains between caste and class. At least the history of India stands as a testimony to this fact. The caste ideology remains autonomous from the system of class in a certain sense. And it is essential for the caste ideology to exist in that way, if it wishes to remain really effective.

If the caste ideology were to reflect the class division, then it would lose all its divinity and aura. We should not forget that caste ideology is a religious ideology, which obtains its authority from religion, through occupational and matrimonial restrictions, and on the basis of purity/pollution, to justify its hierarchy. Obviously, if we comprehend this, then it becomes easier for us to realise that caste can never perfectly overlap with class. They can have a relation of correspondence only. But definitely, caste ideology from the time of its inception to this day has been providing an enormously powerful instrument to the ruling class in different forms. On the one hand it keeps the poor toiling masses under structural subordination, and at the same time it keeps them divided among themselves in so many castes. But the caste ideology performs this task in different ways, keeping itself in conformity with different modes of production.

It is this utility of the caste ideology that made it tolerable to the rulers of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire, or rather we should say that it made itself desirable to them. **Irfan Habib** has shown that the Muslim rulers have not only kept themselves away from tampering with the caste system, they never even mouthed a couple of bad words against it. The only Muslim observer who has made a mild criticism of the caste system was a scientist namely, Alberuni. But if we leave this exception, then the Muslim rulers per-se have never objected against caste oppression and repression. On the contrary, when the Arabs conquered Sind, the commander of the army sanctioned the terrible casteist oppression of the Jatt population. Islam criticises the Hinduism only for idol worship and polytheism. But it views the caste system with jealousy! The Quran only mentions the distinction between a slave and a free man; had it not been so, the religious leaders and administrators might have tried to co-opt this system in their own way! And in practice, the caste system has successfully made inroads into the Islamic society. The people from the dalits and the lower castes who adopted Islam came to be known as *kamins*, which means inferior and lowly. All of this does not mean that the caste system possesses some deadly but divine weapon that pollutes everything that comes into its contact, but itself never perishes. It only means that, in all ages the casteist ideology has presented itself to the rulers who came to India, as a readymade, extremely flexible, and useful tool for the legitimization its exploitation. In such a case, why should any ruling class shy away from putting it into use? This is the reason why the caste system remained intact as a useful ideology providing religious ritualistic legitimization to class exploitation throughout the medieval era.

Historicity and Contemporaneity of Caste in Modern India: A Brief Note

With the start of the colonial era, the caste system went through a few significant changes. The principal factors behind these changes can be observed on different levels.

At one level the contemporary form of the caste system and caste hierarchy itself was consolidated with certain changes. For instance, in 1793 when Permanent Settlement was implemented, it provided a base for the exploitation and oppression of the landless

dalit castes. At the same time, the Ryotwari land settlement made one section of peasant castes, which was already showing upward mobility, owners of land. Mahalwari settlement in a way passed the control over the land to the chief of the village community. The land reforms brought by the British did not make any appreciable change in the casteist hierarchy and equations prevalent in different areas. If anything came out of it, it was that, that a thorough arrangement was made to keep the dalit population in a perpetual state of structural oppression, exploitation and repression even in the future. In some places their oppressors were the old upper castes viz. the brahmin and the kcatriya castes (e.g. in the United Province and Northern India) and in others they belonged to the emerging peasant castes which although had the status of shudras in the ritualistic hierarchy, but economically and politically their condition had improved.

Yet another level at which the British had influenced the caste system was development of industries to a certain extent and their role in bringing in the railways. Marx had foretold that the hereditary division of labour, which prevailed in the caste system, would begin to break with the development of railways and industries. Broadly this formulation proved to be correct. The British did not develop the industries on very large scale. In a way the old industries were destroyed and some new industrial centres had developed whose task was to supply the raw material. But among the proletariat which had grown in the industrial centres such as Calcutta, Bombay, Surat, Ahamedabad etc. the rigid hereditary division of labour was obviously not possible within it. It is true that this proletariat was largely composed by dalit and people from lower castes. But there happened to be a rigid occupational divide among these castes themselves. The process of disintegration of this rigid hereditary division of labour had begun in the British period. Surely, after independence and with the capitalist development, this process unfolded with much rapidity. However it is an undisputable fact that its seed were sown in the colonial era itself.

The third level at which the British colonial state left a profound impact on the caste system is the one which we have already discussed above. The colonial state reconstructed the whole

concept of the caste system. The belief of Nicholas Dirks and other followers of **Subaltern Studies** like him, that caste is an Orientalist construct of the colonial state, would be a kind of subjectivism. No state can ever make a construct of any such divide from the above, unless that division has a history of its own. It must certainly be accepted that the fetish of the the British ethnographic state to count, enumerate, classify and systematise the castes did indeed shake the division and hierarchy in the castes once and made it rigid in a new way. Historians like Arjan Appadurai, Bernard. S. Cohn, Suzanne Bayly, and Nicholas Dirks have written profusely on this whole process. The criticism of people like Dirks by Susan Bayly, Sumit Guha and Richard Eaton is correct that he fails to see the the collaboration between the colonial state and the native elites, including the brahmins also, which led to the reconstruction of the caste system in its modern form. Nor the Subaltern historians are able to understand that the theory of construction of caste by the colonial state for the oppression of the Indian people is like a conspiracy theory which fails to explain that in reality the archives of colonial knowledge, that the colonial state had been building up, was its own necessity, i.e., the necessity of ruling in more effectively. This whole exercise was not for the project of cultural domination rather definite political and economic factors were at work behind it.

Declan Quigley has rightly termed this approach as Idealist. Quigley says that the outcome of the ideas of people like Nicholas Dirks, Ronald Inden, etc is that caste becomes a mental construct, a linguistic jugglery. This point of view a moral ‘crusade’ born out of a kind of imperialist guilt-conscience, which holds imperialism guilty of those crimes, which it simply did not commit. But these of kind of ideologies which work behind this entire exercise end up strengthening imperialism itself. Because in the present era, imperialism is in a direct alliance with the revivalist Fascist forces. They have also the same argument that it was the British who created caste and before that, in Hinduism, we had a division of labour which was based on *karma* only, not on birth.

It is evident that with the development of capitalism and large scale industries and with the further development of urbanization, the two aspects of caste system are moving towards an end. First,

the hereditary division of labour. Determining the occupation or job on the basis of birth is now a thing of the past. The caste character still manifests itself in some occupations in the field of self-employment, for example, washermen, barbers, etc. But this is no more a rigid division of labour, which cannot be transcended. Moreover, commensal prejudices too have been broken to a large extent, because it cannot be continued in the same way in the new kinds of villages, and in the cities and towns their complete disappearance is inevitable. We may say that these two registers of caste have weakened to such an extent that in the near future they will become extinct. These two aspects are not congruent with the capitalist mode of production and production relations, therefore, with the advent of capitalism they were bound to meet this fate. We will not say it in the words of Irfan Habib that the social and economic registers of caste are fading away. But surely the two aspects of caste which we mentioned above, namely, commensal prejudices and hereditary division of labour, are heading towards the end.

There is yet another aspect which is still intact and that is the practice of caste endogamy. It is so because it does not have any conflict with the capitalist mode of production. Actually it is better for capitalism, and is in conformity with it. Even the persistence of patriarchy in a new form in capitalism is due to this very reason. And both these factors reinforce each other; that is to say, the patriarchy reinforces the capitalist system based on caste endogamy and the capitalist caste reinforces capitalist patriarchy. And these two join hands together to allow the capitalist system and the bourgeoisie to streamline its machinery of oppression and exploitation. In one aspect capitalism stands apart from all other pre-capitalist systems. It does not look for any other-worldly power to obtain the legitimation of its rule. It gets the legitimation of its rule from the 'consent' of the masses. This is what **Gramsci** names as hegemony. The rule of the capitalist class is based on hegemony and not on the direct domination. In this system the capitalist class manufactures 'consent' for its rule. In such a system the ideology of caste cannot be the ideology that provides legitimation to the ruling class and its rule as it used to do

earlier. In fact, no religious ideology is any more able to perform this task because the legitimization of the rule in its entirety is, by its own nature, no more other-worldly, but has become this-worldly. However, the question of caste system is not linked with the state only. Over the centuries the casteist mentality and ideology, with the various changes it has undergone, has been made to permeate every pore of the Indian psyche. The core of the casteist mentality and ideology is the hierarchy determined on the basis of purity/pollution, and not a particular caste hierarchy, that prevailed during a particular historical era. This casteist ideology works in subtle forms and it does not always require invocation by the ruling classes. No capitalist ruling class can draw its legitimization from the caste ideology, but can use the caste ideology in two ways. One, to keep sections of the exploited working masses divided on casteist lines, and along with it, as a instrument to construct hegemony in its favour. We can see the naked run of this entire process during the bourgeois elections. Besides, as we have mentioned elsewhere, different factions of the ruling class in their mutual rivalry use caste equations, albeit rulers of every caste without fail, stand united against the people.

The capitalist development of agriculture has brought in many significant changes in the caste structure during the last fifty years. We can see these changes in the upsurge of the middle peasant castes. Over the whole region from South India to Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana and Punjab right up to Gujarat, it is a well-recognised phenomenon. Most of these middle castes are backward castes whose ritualistic status is that of *Āvudra*. However, in their own areas they have become economically and politically powerful, dominating castes. All other castes, which include the brahmins and *thakurs* remain under their domination. We may call these castes kulak castes as well. Sociologists like **Gloria Raheja, McKim Marriott** etc have made considerable efforts to theoretically formulate this entire phenomenon. Raheja while making a study of a village Pahansu of Uttar Pradesh tells that in this village Gujjars are the dominant caste with all the other castes surrounding it. Here Raheja presents the theory of '**centrality of the dominant caste**' and tells that it is the Gujjar caste that gives gifts and donations to all the other castes, but apart from *kanyadaan* (a ritual of donating girl

performed during wedding) it does not accept any donation. Giving donations is symbolic of their elevated status. The relation of the Gujjars with other castes is the relation of authority and power, but no such mutual hierarchy is seen in the rest of the castes.

There is yet another phenomenon which we can consider as an outcome of the domination of the capitalist mode of production. It is the decline in the status of the brahmins living on alms and donations. In some places, their status has become just like that of the dalits. In our opinion, the reason behind it is that, in a capitalist society only exchange gets recognition or it is the practice offering gifts among people of equivalent status (of course, we all know that this also is a kind of exchange only, and nothing else!). With the emergence of capitalist social formation decline in the material and ritualistic status of brahmins who live on alms and donations is quite normal and it can be understood.

Epilogue

All sorts of phenomena can be enumerated which have occurred in the caste system with the emergence of the capitalist mode of production; the capitalist system of production would definitely not put an end to the caste system. The caste system provides it with continuity of property relations in the form of caste endogamy and also a powerful political instrument to divide the masses. With capitalist development and emergence of a massive class of proletariat, the aspect of gap in the correspondence between class and caste has increased considerably. This correspondence becomes visible only with incisive study. For instance, in the present times, this correspondence between class and caste can be seen more strongly among the class of landless peasants. But the population of the other backward castes and the middle castes has rapidly grown in the entire proletariat. But the weakening of the correspondence between caste and class has created an opportunity for capitalism to use caste ideology. While on the one hand, conditions of spontaneous breaking up of caste bonds in the working class arise; on the other hand, the ruling classes also get an opportunity to divide the proletariat on caste lines. Had this gap been small and had 80 to 90 percent of the proletariat come from the dalit castes, the scope of use of the

caste ideology to divide it would have been less.

Therefore, the caste ideology is providing a powerful weapon to capitalism to divide the proletariat and, through caste endogamy, maintain the continuity of the sacred bourgeois property. Therefore, it would be foolish to expect capitalism to put an end to the caste system. But at the same time it is also essential to understand that the caste system has not remained the same from its inception; it has been continuously changing, and the principal factors behind these changes have been the changes in production relations, mode of production, and class contradictions. It is also evident that the caste system has come into existence along with class, state and patriarchy and has become an instrument for their legitimization. Therefore, till class, state and patriarchy exist in any form, the caste contradictions, ideology and mentality too will continue to exist. Only a struggle for a classless society can be a struggle for a casteless society. This certainly does not mean that the question of caste should be pushed under the carpet till the time, the struggle for a classless society reaches completion. On the contrary, it means that from this day itself the proletariat in its struggle against capitalism, has to wage a war against all these ideologies, identities which break it, divide it and disintegrate its resistance. Without a relentless, untiring propaganda against caste and casteism the proletariat cannot be organised against capitalism and without the establishment of a socialist state under the leadership of the proletariat and without marching forward to a classless communist society, caste and casteism can never be destroyed.



Certainly, it was not a comprehensive and complete account of historiography of caste, nor is it proper to expect this from an paper. More than just presenting historical facts, our objective was to reject every kind of reification of the caste/varna system (be it done by the post-modernists, Orientalists etc., be it done by the state, or then, done by the religious authorities, or else, by those who themselves practice identity politics on the basis of caste), every kind of its *valorization*, every kind of idealization, essentialization, and naturalization; to understand the caste system in its historicity and dynamism; to comprehend the essential

character of this historicity and dynamism, that is to say, to understand the dynamics of production relations, mode of production, and class contradictions; and to grasp the fact that if the varna/caste system which, through its origin and development over some thousands of years, determined by its socio-economic context and background has reached this juncture, then the same would happen in future as well.

To say that, ‘caste determines everything’ would be reductionism to the same extent, as it is to say that ‘only economic factors determine everything’, and Marx and Engels have rejected determinism of all shades in the characterization of a social phenomenon and have advocated a dialectical and historical materialist method. If it is understood that the caste/varna system has a beginning, then we can think about the projects to put an end to it in a more meaningful way. Without understanding it in its historicity, we will be either a victim of defeatism or pessimism, or else, of a pseudo-optimism which is always more dangerous than pessimism. The only objective of this essay of ours was to present in all humility, a historical understanding of the caste system, and if we have been able to present even a hazy portrait, we will consider ourselves successful.

(Translated from Hindi: Debashish Barat)

CASTE, CLASS AND IDENTITY POLITICS

Shivani

The beginning, on a large scale, of what is termed as identity politics can be traced back to the decade of 1980. As is clear from its name, the concept of identity is central to it. In sociological and socio-anthropological terms, 'identity' is a set of behavioural and individual characteristics which gives recognition to an individual as member of a group. This identity is determined by objective social categories such as caste, gender, religious community, race etc. and is generally considered as relatively stable, static and naturally given. It is this very definition of identity which is the point of departure for identity politics. However, as a collective phenomenon, it does not speak of any single identity; rather it emphasises on several fragmented identities. This fragmentation of identities not only takes place at the level of personality of an individual, but also at the plane of society as a whole. In a class society, a man\woman has multiple identities. Every individual has the identities of caste, language, region and nationality. The identity politics highlights these identities and essentialises them. One of the identities (which cannot be even termed as an identity in the true sense) which this politics does not even mention is the class identity. The class identity is not given naturally, racially, regionally or linguistically. The class identity is formed during society's basic activity viz. the productive activity; the people who are engaged in these activities come to establish certain definite social relations which are independent of their will. However, the politics of identity never lays any emphasis on this identity. You will get to see

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innumerable NGOs which are founded on gender, caste, region or linguistic identity. However, you can hardly come across any workers' NGO!

What is the motive behind overstressing the primitive communal identity and ignoring the class identity? In order to understand this, it is imperative to first understand the global material background of the emergence of the identity politics. Besides, the phenomenon of emergence of fora such as, 'New Social Movements', World Social Forum as well as that of non-government organisations (NGOs) must be contextualised within the perspective of identity politics.

The Material Background of the Rise of Identity Politics

In the 1980s and 1990s, following the beginning of the process of globalization, the neo-liberal economic policies were implemented in those countries of the world where people were uprooted on a large scale, the unemployment increased rapidly and popular unrest grew tremendously. In such a scenario, in order to douse the extreme public anger over the effects of the processes of globalization and in order to blur the ever intensifying class contradictions, a need for the ideological weapon of the identity politics arose which could, at least, look radical in its appearance. The identity politics while talking about the "peripheral" and "marginalised" identities, overlooks the class identity. For instance, there is an NGO called World Mountain People's Association which is funded by the French government. This NGO appeals to unite all the people living in the Mountainous regions, not only in the country but throughout the world! According to it, the mountainous people, irrespective of the fact whether they are rich or poor, share the same issues because they live on mountains! This, too, is a kind of politics based on the invocation of regional and communal identity.

Thus, the identity politics was brought into play to prevent any class-based unity as a result of intensifying class division and polarization due to globalization. The identity politics is, in fact, a part of the internal mechanism of the global capitalism which is funded by the capitalism itself as a counter-balancing force for keeping in check the inevitable explosive social consequences of the

process of globalization. If the independent logic of capital develops uninterrupted, the explosion of social class polarization and deepening social contradictions would soon take the capitalist system towards its culmination. In order to prevent this to happen, the bourgeois theoreticians, statepowers and international agencies keep on creating different kinds of 'speed breakers' and 'safety-valves', erecting the second and third line of defence for the system and infiltrating different kinds of 'Trojan horses' within the mass movements. The forums such as World Social Forum, which claims to be a common platform for the 'new social movements', are performing the role of such Trojan horses only. This name itself is amusing. They stress on being social precisely because they are not political. Being political would mean to raise the question of state, the question of system. However, these movements do not wish to raise precisely these questions. Today the same is being done by the so-called 'New Social Movements' as well as myriad NGOs and organizations and movements sponsored by them which raise the slogan of identity politics. They take away the problem of state and system from the realm of questions. The capitalist class is never put into the dock. What is not spelt out is that who the enemy is and whom to fight. Raising finger against the government is deemed incorrect and by employing radical slogans and talking about people's initiative, initiative from below etc. responsibility of all sorrows, distress and problems is put on people's shoulders.

There is yet another important point which needs to be drawn attention to. The capitalist system is a homogeniser and it requires certain extent of uniformity on the plane of identity. On the economic plane, capitalism carries out a process of universalization. The economic universalization gets expressed in the universalization in the superstructure as well. Capitalism undertakes a kind of universalisation of the identity of man/woman, too, as well as, in form of a human being, as an independent individual, too, at least temporarily, it does this. It is capitalism itself which creates a sense of class within the working class and in this sense if we term the class as identity in a particular historical sense, it creates a class identity. But this universal identity could prove dangerous for capitalism, especially in its most moribund and parasitic phase because it, on its own, moves towards class polarization. It is for the first time that

capitalism creates class divisions in the society in such an intense manner. The class consciousness which gets generated in this process is fatal to capitalism.

Therefore, while on the economic plane the moribund capitalism, which is devoid of all progressive potentialities, requires universalization, it needs fragments on the plane of superstructure. It needs to revive all those dead identities against which it had declared a war during the anti-feudal struggle. It is in this broad perspective that the political agenda behind the identity politics can be situated.

Identity Politics and Postmodernism

This is nothing but a postmodernist agenda. The postmodernist philosophy informs us that the era of meta-narratives is over. Every kind of universalization, generalization, homogenization and standardization is repressive. The Western Imperialism subordinates the Eastern world in the name of modernity, rationality etc. According to the postmodernist philosophy, all these ideologies, in fact, are part of a Western conspiracy, namely, enlightenment! As against the Western colonial discourse, it glorifies ‘traditional knowledge’, ‘oriental innocence’, indigenous community, identity, language, culture etc. Although Postmodernism is against all kinds of essentialization, it does positive absolutization of myriad pre-modern/oriental identities in its fight against modernity. Whatever is native and pre-modern is good; modernity is undesirable.

It was Lyotard who pioneered the agenda of Postmodernism on the philosophical plane in the latter half of 1970s and early half of 1980s. Subsequently various ‘post’ ideological streams began to be piled up, e.g. Post-colonial thought, Post-Structuralism, Post-Marxism, Post-Feminism, Post-Orientalism etc. All of these are, essentially, various parts, dimensions or extensions of the postmodernist thought itself. The focal point of all these thought-streams is the concept of power. According to Michel Foucault, a major stalwart of post-modernist thought, power permeates every nook and corner of the society; and it is diffused and decentralised. It is prevalent in every part of day-to-day life and it gets internalised by people. It is irresistible because any effective collective resistance, which has the potential of social transformation, gives rise to the ‘new forms of power’. Hence any collective fight for

any social transformation is undesirable. Every collective resistance will give rise to new forms of power and therefore, all collective resistance against repression is futile. If collective resistance will ultimately give rise to power and repression only, why take pain to resist against it, at all? Under such a situation how could then one resist power? As per Foucault, you could resist against power and repression by rejecting all kinds of norms and universals in your personal life. The concept of standardization, universalization and generalization remain at the heart of power and repression. The only way out is to rebel against all norms and universals pertaining to gender identity, caste identity etc. in the personal life. The same was termed as Queer Theory by Foucault. It is not a coincidence that in the NGO world, numerous NGOs are working on the alternative sexual identity for the rights of LGBT (Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Trans gender) community. It is evident that by rejecting the concept of all kinds of collective resistance (read class resistance!) Postmodernism takes away all kinds of agency from change.

Where then lies the solution? Some other postmodernist philosophers suggest slightly different solution. According to them, the solution lies in those structures which are yet to be polluted with the influence of power. Colonialism and Imperialism happen to be a form of power itself. They were resisted from the ground of Nationalism in the anti-colonial struggle. However, Nationalism too, is a modern philosophy which happens to be a product of West. Hence the power structure is inherent in it too. That is why, the post-colonial state, which came into being after the successful fight of nationalism, is, in fact, a modern state. Today Imperialism cannot be opposed from the ground of Modernism because modernity happens to be a cultural-philosophical project for the global domination of Imperialism itself and from its ground the hegemony and power cannot be resisted. Therefore, as per these thinkers we will have to find out those structures which are pre-modern, which are untouched by power and untouched by western influence! And what all could such structures entail? All pre-modern identities, all “primitive” identities (here the term primitive is not used in the sense of being backward, rather to refer to those identities which do not arise during socio-economic interaction or exchange, rather they are naturally given) such as tribal, Dalit,

woman (particularly within the home!) etc. Thus, according to the postmodernist thought, Enlightenment, scientific revolutions, rationality, humanism etc. are all part of a project of global domination by West. According to them, all these need to be rejected because they are reductionist, universalistic, monolithic and homogenising etc.

Marxism, in particular, is always targetted by these streams of thought. Marxism, too, is rejected by terming it as part of a 'modernist meta-narrative project' as well as of western conspiracy for establishing global domination of Enlightenment. Although someone who has studied even the basic works of Marxism, knows that Marxism has never adopted a non-dialectical or uncritical approach towards Enlightenment. For instance, in the pamphlet 'Socialism: Utopian and Scientific' written for workers, Engels had drawn attention to both the positive and negative aspects of enlightenment philosophy and rationality. However, the motive of the likes of Foucault and Lyotard behind throwing the entire project of enlightenment into the garbage bin is not so much to cast aside the heritage of their bourgeois forefathers than it is to attack Marxism. It is akin to waging a proxy war against Marxism. Marxism as well as all those ideologies which talks of social transformation, are declared as western conspiracy and we are told not to think about class, socialism etc. Instead we have to preserve the smaller fragments i.e. community, caste, domestic world of women, etc. All these are autonomous spaces which are free from the influence of power structures of western Enlightenment. Since the era of meta-narratives is over, hence the era of class struggle, revolution, social change, which happen to be meta-narratives, is also over. This is the postmodern era and in the postmodern era, in the words of Lyotard itself, 'meta-narratives are incredulous'. (The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, 1979).

Therefore, now it is the era of smaller, fragmented, peripheral struggles—the caste-based struggles, women's struggles, tribals' struggle, the struggles of indigenous communities for preserving the environment etc. We have to build an autonomous space for these peripheral identities while remaining within the ambit of the system.

Few years ago, "Post-Marxist" thinkers, Ernesto Laclau and

Chantal Mouffe, in their book 'Hegemony and Socialist strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics' have taken this postmodernist philosophy to greater heights! As per Laclau and Mouffe, all kinds of repression are subjective. It has nothing to do with the objective reality and the concrete inhumanities of repression. This, in fact, amounts to deny the possibility of a broad united movement against an exploitative and repressive system. In other words, here, too, the irresistibility of the power structures is being highlighted.

Postmodern Agenda and Sub-altern Studies in India

In the intellectual world of India, the postmodernist agenda has been most effectively implemented by the historians of **Subaltern Studies**. After initially confining itself largely to the Marxist terminology and analysis, a linguistic turn occurred in the Subaltern Studies under the influence of Edward Said and Michel Foucault. Within the Subaltern Studies, the postmodern agenda was effectively implemented especially by **Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gyanendra Pandey and Gyan Prakash**. In the early articles of the Subaltern Studies series of books, **Ranajit Guha** described the purpose of this entire endeavour as to "correct the elitist bias" in the history writing. However, the subsequent Subaltern Studies remained vacillating between derivative discourse, indigenous community and 'fragment', all the three of which are the categories of postmodernist discourse. Partha Chatterjee, in his book 'Nationalist Thought in a Colonial World: a Derivative Discourse', says that the intellectual class in India had come under the hegemony of colonial power-knowledge and hence it was capable of only undertaking derivative discourse. Thus, the middle class intellectual realm in the National Movement had entirely come under the grips of the modern thought. It enjoyed no agency. Beyond this intellectual world, in which the structures of power have made inroads and thus polluted it, there lies a world of community consciousness which is pure, primitive and holy. In Indian context, Partha Chatterjee sees it in relation to 'peasant consciousness' which happens to be free from the western hegemonic influence. Gandhi is claimed to be its symbol.

Such an analogy is, however, amusing. Gandhi was a modern

thinker. His humanism, despite its spiritual cover, language and style, was essentially a bourgeois humanism. Partha Chatterjee does not deem it necessary to see as to how colonialism had co-opted the indigenous structures and used them in colonial exploitation. And these indigenous structures were used not due to their 'oriental innocence' (as stated by Ashish Nandy) but owing to their vested interests.

After **Edward Said** and **Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak** joined the project of Subaltern Studies, the emphasis on fragments and communities was enhanced. The postcolonial state was declared as being part of the project of western cultural domination of Enlightenment. This state had come into existence via nationalism, which was nothing but the derivative discourse of the colonial discourse. Severed from socio-economic perspective and context, the community and fragments were glorified.

In 1993, with Partha Chatterjee's book 'The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Post-colonial Studies', the Subaltern Studies attained its logical nirvana. Chatterjee discusses Dalits, women, etc. separately as the fragments of nation. There cannot share a common agenda and all these fragments are reified in such a manner that they could not be joined together. According to Chatterjee, during the Nationalist phase, the expression of the initiative and autonomy of women could only be found in home, or at the most, in autobiographies. Chatterjee is completely silent on all the myriad activities and political associations in which women had enthusiastically participated in the 1920s. This book is silent even on the caste-based movements of Phule, Periyar or Ambedkar. In this book, Chatterjee puts forward a new binary—material/spiritual. 'Material' is that which is outside, non-domestic, masculine and 'spiritual' is that which is inside, domestic and feminine. In the spiritual world, the colonial subject used to establish its autonomy while being co-opted by the British in the material world; for instance, on the issue of equality before law, Chatterjee considers it to be co-opted by the western hegemonic project. Every resistance against Imperialism which was carried out in a modern manner, in a secular way, and with economic critique, in fact, amounted to surrendering before the hegemonic enlightenment project of Imperialism. That is to say, all the battles which Nationalism fought

were co-option by Imperialism

In this opposition to modernity, **Dipesh Chakrabarty** has left even Partha Chatterjee behind. In his article titled ‘The Difference Deferral of a Colonial Modernity: Public Debates on Domesticity in British Bengal’, Chakrabarty has found irreducible categories of “beauty” in the domestic glorification of *Kul* and *Grih Lakshmi*. Chatterjee sees them as an ideal form of autonomous, non-bourgeois and non-secular individuality. Here no one needs to ask the question ‘why’. So what if these are patriarchal, after all they are pre-modern! Chakrabarty believes that a woman’s strength lies in the arena of oriental domesticity only. Thus, the women must feel complacent by looking for the source of their strength in precisely those tasks which the Hindu religion and civilization deems fit for women! What it is, if not a vulgar perversion of the resistance of women?

The Subaltern historians take the concept of the autonomy of the communities to the extent of putting an end to the interference of modern state in the community affairs. Did anyone hear the resonance of allowing Khap Panchayats to carry out freely their barbaric Talibanistic diktats in this? It is not surprising at all. This entire discourse is at times found standing on the side of communal fascism and at others, on that of neo-liberal capitalism. In the domain of oriental innocence, all that comes which takes place in Indian society, without the interference of state. For instance, practice of Sati, the protection of culture by the Khap Panchayats, the repression of women etc. The modern state does not have any interference in all these, and often, it is some section of people themselves who execute such acts on the basis of their much eulogised pre-modern and oriental consciousness. And yet these all are proper and desirable for the afore-mentioned Subaltern historians because they are feats of the oriental innocence divided or organised, as they are, in fragments.

Two Forms of Identity Politics and the Intersection between Caste Politics and Identity Politics

The identity politics derives its ideological fuel from this very postmodernist stream of thought. The fragments which the Postmodernism talks about is being implemented on the plane of identities by identity politics. The entire NGO sector is also linked

with this very idea. By dividing the different sections of masses into fragmented identities, the NGO sector is carrying out the dangerous task of misdirecting and disintegrating the people's struggle through reformism. In fact, it is a conspiracy of blunting the class consciousness of people by celebrating the fragments. The NGO sector acts as a mechanism of 'safety-valve' within the capitalist system and every now and then, it plays the role of restraining people's anger and discontent. We must understand the gravity of their conspiracy.

There is yet another perspective where the influence of identity politics can be discerned. The surge of the fascist majoritarian Hindutva politics in recent years is, in fact, an expression of politics of identity itself. Any such right-wing fundamentalist politics is established on a static ideal of identity and acquires legitimation for the same by posing the myths as reality and common sense through an imagined past. All such right-wing appropriations are inherent in identity politics. In present times, not only the peripheral identities, but more so the mainstream identities are using the tool of identity politics for their vested interests. This, too, is a dangerous trend.

Both these forms of the identity politics present themselves as contrary and alternative to each other; however, in reality they are not two separate antagonistic forces at all. They only present themselves as such. That is to say, the NGO politics and the right-wing religious fundamentalist and communal fascist politics are the two sides of the same coin. Although they present themselves as mutually antagonistic, they share a fundamental unity in terms of ideology and philosophy. We can say that they present themselves as the binary of false alternatives. The same was termed as 'disjunctive synthesis' by Gilles Deleuze—a set of opposites in which the elements presented as opposites are, in fact, not opposite to each other.

After examining the key theoretico-ideological formulations of the identity politics and revealing its philosophical essence, now we are largely in a position to arrive at the conclusion that in the present times, the caste-based politics is actually a form of identity politics only. The caste-based politics in both its avatars—the casteist politics of upper castes and the Dalit politics—is an expression of identity politics only. In this form, they can be

termed as 'inverted mirror image' of each other. Here too, we can see a kind of 'disjunctive synthesis', a binary of false alternatives, which in reality are not at all alternatives of each other; because in their own ways, both are based on the 'over-identification' of politics with the caste identity. Here it is not necessary to discuss the casteist identity politics being put to practice by the different organizations of the upper castes. Nothing remains to be deciphered regarding its reactionary, barbaric and inhuman character. There is tremendous unity between form and content.

However, the politics practised around the Dalit identity by the Dalit organizations, too, is fulfilling the agenda of the identity politics itself, even if in some cases there is a genuine desire for and intention of Dalit emancipation. No politics and organization based upon identity can have a project for social emancipation. No real fundamental issue can be meaningfully raised on the basis of caste-based, gender-based, linguistic or national identity. Therefore, through identity politics, the Dalit organizations are, in fact, serving, even if unconsciously, the capitalist system itself. This is the class character of the identity politics which is status-quoist as well as reactionary. All their good intentions notwithstanding, such Dalit organizations are not being able to implement a really effective project of Dalit emancipation; moreover, they could never be able to prepare any such project, standing as they are on the ground of identity politics. Undoubtedly, there are many such people in these organizations who, honestly and militantly think about the project of Dalit emancipation and are active. However, in absence of a correct politics, such thinking and activism often do not head in any direction, or usually begin to serve the forces representing the status-quo. Because as long as it is not clear as to who is really responsible for the caste-based oppression as well as other forms of exploitation-oppression and whom should one fight, the resistance against it, is bound to be misplaced. Here it is necessary to clarify that when we are referring to Dalit organizations here, we do not at all mean the bourgeois electoral parties deeply enmeshed in the bourgeois politics like BSP which claim to represent the interests of Dalits but use them merely as vote-bank (although till a few years ago, several intellectuals

claiming to be leftist were gloating over Mayawati's ascent to power, over the fact that now the steps of Dalits are being heard in the corridors of power. Thankfully, such foolish cacophony has been silenced with all the records of atrocities committed on Dalits being broken during Mayawati's reign!). In this respect, the less one talks about Bahujan Samaj Party, the better. The BSP, under the leadership of Mayawati, has set several new records of bourgeois electoral opportunism. To savour the fruits of power, it did not even refrain from making an electoral alliance with the upper-casteist fascist Hindu right-wing forces. In Uttar Pradesh, the brunt of Mayawati's 'social engineering' had been borne by none other than the poor Dalits themselves. Among those who practise electoral Dalit identity politics, the case of Mayawati is not unique or peculiar. The position of Ramdas Athawale, Dalit Panthers' leader in Tamil Nadu, Thor Thirumavalvan, Ramvilas Paswan etc. is no different. At times, they are seen sitting in the lap of BJP and at others in Congress's.

The hollowness of politics, of not only these electoral Dalit political parties (which are intentionally dishonest, too and which are wholeheartedly engrossed in serving capitalism) but even that of the non-electoral Dalit organizations practising identity politics (many of which honestly raise the agenda of Dalit liberation) could be revealed through just one incident which goes on to show that there is nothing left in their politics, except for empty symbolism. Recently, two incidents occurred on the national plane, which were of real and symbolic importance for the common poor Dalit population. One was the exoneration of the rich upper-caste people accused of genocide of Dalits in Bathani Tola by the court and the another was putting a cartoon of Nehru and Ambedkar in the NCERT book prepared by Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palsikar. Both these incidents took place within a gap of only few days. But many Dalit organizations forgot even to issue a statement on the release of the accused in the Bathani Tola genocide, while much mayhem was caused on the cartoon controversy. Some people even attacked the office of Suhas Palsikar. It is a matter of a separate discussion as to what was right and what was wrong in the cartoons of Nehru and Ambedkar; this, too, could be a matter detailed discussion as to whether Ambedkar can be criticised or he should be declared

beyond criticism, so that the “nation” could get rid of “upper-caste guilt conscience”; one could even discuss as to whether there is any qualitative difference between what was done in Suhas Palshikar’s office and what the Hindutva forces used to do with Hussain’s paintings or what they did in the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute; and finally there could be a discussion even on the issue as to whether there is any need for new idols in a country full of idols of various kinds. However, for now we will not go into these discussions and would only allude to the fact that the Dalit organizations did not make as much noise on the acquittal of the murderers of Bathani Tola as they did on the cartoons of Ambedkar and Nehru. Does it not reveal the hollow symbolism of the whole of Dalit identity politics?

Like all bourgeois political forces, the parties practising Dalit identity politics safeguard those very class relations which prepare the conditions for caste-based oppression. And all caste-based parties prevent the forging of class unity and end up strengthening the caste-based dividing line. And even the non-electoral Dalit identity politics objectively does the same thing. The political character of an organization is not determined by the socio-economic roots of its members. For instance, a Dalit organization cannot be accepted as being representing the correct politics of the Dalit liberation simply because the majority of its members happen to be Dalits. It is from this ground that several Dalit thinkers often ask as to how many Dalits are there in the leadership of a particular party. For instance, often this question is posed by the Dalit thinkers to the people belonging to communist party that how many Dalits are there in their Central Committee. However, from the same logic can’t someone ask a question from the numerous existing Dalit organizations that how many workers are there in their leading bodies? We believe that both these questions are incorrect and are raised from the ground of identitarian thinking. This then follows that we can decide about the political ideology of an organization through the family and birth of those present in its leadership. Is not this too a kind of Brahmanical logic? The character of a political ideology is determined by the fact as to which particular class is this ideology serving, not by the fact as in which family its carriers were born. The logic of identity politics is a circular logic which in no

time brings you to the same place where you started from. In a way, it contains the logic of its own defeat within itself. The correct way of attacking the savarnvad should be to eradicate it forever. How does emphasising upon the Dalit identity from the logic of identity politics assist in the objective of striking a blow on savarnvad? It is obvious that the casteism of the upper-castes cannot be countered, under any circumstance, from the ground of identitarian Dalit politics.

So what should be done in such a scenario? We would like to reiterate that we will have to mobilise broad cross-section of poor population around an identity which could result into maximum possible mass-mobilisation; and class identity happens to be one such identity which is not an identity in the true sense of the term. The concept of class expresses a social relation. According to **Lenin**, “Classes are large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in the historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organization of labour, and, consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it. Classes are groups of people one of which can appropriate the labour of another owing to the different places they occupy in a definite system of social economy.” As is clear from this definition, class is a relative concept. Class is not only an economic phenomenon but it gets expressed in the multiple forms in culture, literature and society. The charges of class reductionism and economic determinism levelled against Marxism, in fact, amounts to maltreatment of facts. **Engels** had clarified at one place, “According to the materialist conception of history, the ultimately determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. Other than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the *only* determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure—political forms of the class struggle and its results, to wit: constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc., juridical forms, and

even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the participants, political, juristic, philosophical theories, religious views and their further development into systems of dogmas—also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form.”

Class “identity” is a modern “identity” which internally cuts across all other identities. This is the identity which could give rise to a progressive revolutionary mass mobilisation. In this sense, class identity is an overriding identity which exists by cutting across all other identities. Whatever be the nation, whatever be the caste, the language, the region, its people are divided in classes and an acute polarization has taken place among them. Here it is important to clarify that to highlight the class identity is not to suppress or destroy the particularities of other identities. To consolidate the class identity is to raise the class consciousness and its aim is to do extensive mass mobilisation around the class identity, whatever be the caste, religion, region, language, nationality etc. The path of the project for emancipation of broad cross-section of masses could be only this. As soon as we recognise the forces responsible for the caste-based, national, gender-based oppression, we realise that our common enemy in the project for Dalit liberation, putting an end to national repression, annihilation of women oppression and inequality is capitalism and the capitalist class itself. The caste could be eliminated only when the project for the radical transformation of the entire socio-economic structure, abolition of every kind of inequality and establishment of an egalitarian society reaches its destination. It surely does not mean that we are putting forth a proposal to keep on hold the struggle against casteism and casteist mentality till such a revolution and the creation of such a society takes place. We know it very well that without a perpetual propaganda against the casteist mentality and casteism, the proletariat, too, cannot be united as a class. In fact, the task of creating class consciousness is inevitably and imminently linked to the struggles against caste and casteism with full force from today itself. Without this the proletariat cannot be aroused, mobilised and organised against capitalism as a class. But all

attempts of reifying this important question of caste as a separate fragment will lead towards the identity politics only and will play no less a role in dividing the toiling masses in pieces than the capitalist upper-caste ideology. Therefore, the solution to the caste question calls for a revolutionary class perspective, not the identity politics which celebrates the fragments.

(Translated from Hindi: Anand Singh)